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# Exploitation and Misrule in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa

Edited by Kenneth Kalu · Toyin Falola

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Kenneth Kalu • Toyin Falola  
Editors

# Exploitation and Misrule in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa

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## PREFACE

Resentment to colonial exploitation and consequent underdevelopment of the colonies was the common theme around which Africa's nationalists rallied to confront the colonial government, and push for political independence. Through various means, African nationalists opposed colonial rule and sought for self-government, ostensibly to curb the exploitation that colonialism represented and to work for the economic development of the continent. Nationalist rhetoric suggested that political independence would bring an end to exploitation of the continent by foreigners, restore the dignity of the African, and chart a course for sustainable development for the benefit of Africans. In a way, colonialism was seen as the evil that must be eliminated in order to give Africa its rightful place in the global political economy. Guided by this mindset, political independence became an end to itself, rather than a means to an end. Consequently, Africans came together irrespective of ethnicity or religious beliefs to fight against the perceived common enemy of that era—European colonial masters.

Colonial rule began to crumble in the middle of the twentieth century, with Ghana gaining political independence in 1957 and several other countries becoming independent in the 1960s. Based on the rhetoric of nationalist leaders of that era, and the misconception that self-governance meant the same as good governance, Africans welcomed political independence with excitement and hope. The expectations were that independent African states would deliver good governance that would generate development and unleash the potentials that were suppressed under colonial rule. However, the first decade of political independence produced series of crises that almost questioned the idea of political independence. A few

years after independence, the political and economic conditions in many African states deteriorated. Military coups became more of a norm than an aberration. By the end of the 1970s, almost every country in Sub-Saharan Africa was facing one political crises or the other. Civil wars, ethnic and religious conflicts, and general social disorders had become commonplace across the continent. Africa's economy did not fare any better—several failed attempts at industrialization left the countries with burdensome public debt and deteriorating public infrastructure. As the government failed to provide basic social services, discontent grew among the populace, who had looked up to political leaders to bring real development.

If political independence were to produce inclusive institutions, economic growth, and social stability, African leaders who took over political power from the colonial masters needed to first dismantle the colonial structures that were designed as instruments of exploitation and predation. However, subsisting postcolonial realities have shown that African leaders either were not prepared for the task ahead or lacked the understanding, courage, foresight, and integrity needed to effectively work for the transformation that would produce real social and economic emancipation of the people. The failure to effectively dismantle the colonial governance structures and to transform such institutions as the civil service, the police, the judiciary, and other government agencies into organs for serving the citizens meant that political independence became mere symbolism, with little positive real changes for majority of Africans. In some ways, political independence can be described as mere transfer of the instruments of exploitation from European colonial officials to a few Africans who had received some Western education in the mid-twentieth century.

Contributors to this volume have explored representations and images of colonial and postcolonial exploitation in literature and rhetoric, as well as through case studies that exemplify persistent governance failures from the era of colonial exploitation to postcolonial misrule and perversion across the African region. Overall, there is an emerging consensus that African states must transform the governance institutions that have fostered exploitation and produced underdevelopment and poverty across the continent. Such transformation is necessary to rupture lingering colonial legacies and put the African state on a credible path to sustainable development.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: Exploitation, Colonialism, and Postcolonial Misrule in Africa

*Kenneth Kalu and Toyin Falola*

A number of African states continue to face daunting challenges in their socio-political and economic affairs. Current discourses on Africa's political economy have been dominated by political instability, leadership failures, regional and ethnic strife, economic backwardness, diseases, and high rates of poverty in the general population. The World Bank reports that Africa is currently home to the largest number of the extremely poor in the world,<sup>1</sup> after Southeast Asia recorded tremendous economic and structural transformations during the past three decades. This depressing state of affairs in African countries has expectedly generated a lot of interests from scholars, policy makers, and international development institutions.

<sup>1</sup> The World Bank reports that for the first time in history, Africa has overtaken Asia as the continent with the largest number of poor people on earth. See World Bank's poverty data: <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/povDuplicateWB.aspx>

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While there are diverse explanations for Africa's precarious social and economic conditions, not a few scholars point to African states' governance arrangements, political institutions and culture, and the choices that these institutions support, as the major explanations for the continent's inability to make meaningful progress toward sustainable growth and development.<sup>2</sup> In most African states, subsisting institutions have generally supported crass exploitation of the commonwealth in favor of a tiny elite, leading to a political culture defined by cronyism and clientelism, dictatorship, and prebendalism.<sup>3</sup> The questions that arise is how these forms of institutions evolved and why they have persisted despite their obvious disastrous consequences on the progress of the African state and the well-being of its citizens.

Scholars of African history point to two major epochs that shaped and perhaps continue to shape Africa's sociology, politics, and economics. The horrors of Atlantic slave trade and the exploitation that defined subsequent European colonialism have been identified as two major historical events that set the stage of what we know as Africa today. Along these lines, scholars have, in various ways, articulated the devastating effects of Atlantic slave trade on Africa and its people.<sup>4</sup> Slavery was and perhaps remains the highest form of exploitation. Atlantic slave trade devastated Africa for several centuries, setting the stage for a culture of exploitation, brute force, inequality, subservience, and instability—features that do not

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The origins of power, prosperity and poverty*, (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2012); Ali A. Mazrui and Francis Wiafe-Amoako, *African Institutions: Challenges to political, social, and economic foundations of Africa's development*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford & Bloomington: James Currey & Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Nicolas van de Walle, "Presidentialism and Clientelism in Africa's Emerging Party Systems," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 42 no. 2 (2003): 297–32.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental and African Slave Trades*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Joseph Inikori and Stanley Engerman, "Introduction: Gainers and Losers in the Atlantic Slave Trade" in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies and People in Africa, the Americas, and Europe*, eds., Joseph Inikori and Stanley Engerman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), 1–21; Paul Lovejoy, *Transformation in Slavery: A History in Slavery in Africa*, (2nd Edition). (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Nathan Nunn, "The long-term effects of Africa's slave trades", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123 no. 1 (2008): 139–176.

support sustainable development of any sort. The slave economy made it impossible for African societies to develop stable centralized political authorities over large geographical areas. This was because of the continuous raids, fighting, and wars that facilitated the slave economy. The kings and queens of that era could therefore only exercise effective control over a limited geographical area beyond which it would be impossible to control. Consequently, developing stable centralized authorities over large geographical areas were almost impossible. This made it difficult, if not impossible for authorities, to set up formal and effective institutions to engender civil order over large geographical areas.

Besides the inability to establish effective centralized governance authorities over large areas, slave trade decimated the population of African societies by sending away Africans as slaves to Europe and the Americas. The dynamics of the slave economy—forceful conscription of the citizens, continuous fighting, kidnapping, raids and wars that had to happen to facilitate such conscription—created a society at war with itself. Consequently, tensions and crises became almost a way of life, might became right, and survival of the fittest became the norm. This brand of social evolution permeated African culture and politics and created unequal societies that in turn facilitated continuous and systemic exploitation of the weak.

Most studies on the devastation of Atlantic slave trade focus on what can be described as the hard and perhaps measurable effects of the illicit trade, such as its impacts on the population of African societies,<sup>5</sup> or the cost of lost output that could have been produced by Africans who were sold to slaveholders in foreign land, or the mental torture of the slaves, among other such factors. However, one can argue that the “soft” negative effects of slavery were even more devastating as these shaped the culture and sociology of the African society, creating permanent scars that continue to make it difficult for the societies to achieve stability and development. Slavery institutionalized what can be described as “master-servant” relationships among otherwise similar human beings with equal or similar cognitive abilities and imbued with the same natural sense of taste, feelings, and human instincts. By designating some people as slaves and others as slaveholders, human relationship became defined by exploitation, with the slaveholders (masters) assuming ownership of the intellect, labor, and products of the slaves (servants). This unequal relationship

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

shaped social relations in African societies, with authority figures in political positions often exploiting the masses at will, sometimes with the active collaboration and support of the enslaved. By institutionalizing a culture of subservience and the belief that the master is always right and must be obeyed, slavery created a society that is antithetical to the tenets of Western democracy. Perhaps this is why the rhetoric of democratic governance in most of Africa has failed to produce real liberal democracy in substance, as political leaders continue to pander to choices that enhance their personal interests while putting the citizens at the receiving end. Dictatorships, corruption, and the patron-client relationships that define Africa's political culture are all direct and indirect consequences of these unfortunate master-servant relationships. Unfortunately, these perverse political arrangements are often indirectly supported by the oppressed who in most cases find it difficult or "culturally wrong" to confront the authorities.

### COLONIAL EXPLOITATION

At the end of Atlantic slave trade, Africa entered yet another phase of exploitation under European colonialism. The history of European colonial exploitation in Africa is well documented in a number of studies.<sup>6</sup> The official explanation of European colonial conquest was the pursuit of the Dual Mandate—to develop or introduce light to the "dark" continent, and at the same time advance the economic interests of Europe. In reality, African societies came out of colonialism fractured, exploited, and devastated, with permanent deformities that have so far proven intractable and not amenable to modern economic development. Products of the artificial bifurcation of African societies for allocation to contending European interests of that era later became African countries as we know them today. While the creation of these states was designed to serve the convenience of the colonial masters, little consideration was given to the colonial subjects in terms of the workability of the forced unions given differences in language, culture, and peculiar histories and orientations of the societies that were joined together into one administrative unit. Focusing exclusively

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); Richard Reid, *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present*, (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

on the interests of the metropole, the colonial masters did not give consideration to the workability of these divisions and unions for the citizens. Today, there are crises of identity and nationhood across several African states. One of the consequences of these state structures has been complaints of marginalization of one group by another, leading to disunity, ethnic tensions, and conflict in ways that cannot support social stability and economic development. A consequence of this precarious state structure has been that political contests have moved from being the contest of ideas to the contest of ethnicities, religions, and personalities, thus making mockery of the ideals of Western democracy.

Despite the rhetoric of Dual Mandate, Europe took control of African societies through military conquests and suppressed domestic dissents with military force as well.<sup>7</sup> Colonial Africa was also not an equal society, and the colonial officials made no effort to suggest otherwise. Although the system of colonial administration differed across different countries and across the particular colonial power in question, the principal features of exploitation were the same whether dealing with the British system of indirect rule or the French policy of assimilation or the utterly ravenous exploitation that defined King Leopold's rule over the Congo.

In the search of resources to feed Europe's industrial growth, the colonial officials created governance systems and economic institutions that facilitated wholesale exploitation of Africa's natural resources. The colonial economy revolved around the production of cash crops exclusively for export to Europe. While there is probably nothing wrong with getting the colonies to produce crops for export, the real issue was in the structure of that economic arrangement. Although Africans produced the crops, the farmers had no hands whatsoever in the marketing of their produce—prices were set by European merchants and the colonial government established commodity boards. Although the middlemen and commodity boards were promoted as organs to protect African farmers from price variations in the international market, these organs were in reality agents of exploitation and extortion. While Africans received very little for their effort, European merchants made most of the profit from the colonial economy, leading to the establishment of large European firms that feasted on the sweats of laboring African farmers.

<sup>7</sup>The Mau Mau insurgency in colonial Kenya was one of the strong forces that fought against colonial incursion in Africa. However, the British colonial authorities crushed the insurgents with superior military power. See Reid, *A History of Modern Africa*.

By design, the colonial economic structure forced Africans into producing cash crops for export even at the expense of food production for subsistence. With the introduction of cash money in the colonies based on European currencies, Africans were forced to work for the money in order to meet their daily needs.<sup>8</sup> The only way to earn money was to produce the crops that the colonist wanted, and at the terms set by European merchants. The culture of producing cash crops for export led to abandonment of other economic activities and set the stage for food crises in colonial Africa. The overall effect was a precarious economic structure dependent exclusively on the export of natural resources—a disease that continues to define Africa's economy up to the present day. Interestingly, the economic system set up by the colonial government and that served colonial interests at that time is now being used in disparaging ways to describe African economies, with such terms as “resource curse,” “Dutch disease,” and “resource rent” among others. It is also interesting that contemporary studies have begun to unearth the follies of the colonial economic ideas and the insincerities of those “bearers of light” supposedly on a mission to bring light to the dark continent. Economists have since concluded that resource-dependent economies with little or no industrial capacities are at a disadvantage compared to industrialized countries.<sup>9</sup> This is because natural resources command only little value in the international market compared to industrial goods. Therefore, economies that depend exclusively on the export of natural resources face significant developmental challenges. The economic system set up by the colonial administration in African colonies is at variance with the declaration of the Dual Mandate touted as the primary mission of colonialism. Instead, the colonial economies in substance suggested the pursuit of a single mandate to advance European economic interests, while leaving the African colonies in conditions that would make subsequent development almost impossible. In many ways, the colonial economy fostered exploitation, disrupted Africa's natural developmental process, and institutionalized economic and political cultures anchored on exploitation and predation. These foundations,

<sup>8</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Raul Prebisch, “The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems,” reprinted in *Economic Bulletin for Latin America*, 7 no. 1 (1950): 1–22; Hans Singer, “The distribution of gains between investing and borrowing countries” *American Economic Review*, 40, (1950): 473–85.

unfortunately maintained and expanded by the African leaders who took over political power at independence, have consigned the average African state to the excruciating chains of poverty and underdevelopment.

It must be noted that colonial rule did bring some new developments to the African colonies. One can point to the development of infrastructure, such as paved roads and railways, electricity, and the introduction of Western education and health facilities as some of the benefits of colonialism. These hard infrastructures and the Westminster-style public service are sometimes seen as necessary steps toward bringing Africa to civilization and modernity. While the colonial structures may have in some ways had positive impacts on the life of some Africans, especially on those who were privileged to have direct and indirect contacts with the colonial masters, in reality, any benefits of colonialism were mostly ancillary to the original intentions of the colonial agenda. In a sense, such ancillary benefits to Africans could be described as marginal positive externalities different from the original aim of such policies and programs. For example, the physical infrastructures such as roads and railways were built primarily to link the hinterlands where commodities were produced to the nearest seaport in order to facilitate onward shipment of agricultural produce to Europe.<sup>10</sup> In the same way, European colonial administration introduced Western education to African colonies with the primary intention of training a few Africans on the basics of reading and writing, so these Africans could in turn perform junior clerical duties in the colonial civil service. However, one must note that it was exposure to Western education that eventually helped to create a crop of early nationalists who led the agitations for independence. For a colonial government that was reluctant to discuss political independence for African colonies, it is unlikely that such government intentionally provided Western education that would eventually give Africans the tools to dismantle colonialism.

Even where one acknowledges that colonial rule perhaps had some positive impacts on African societies, the negative effects of colonial conquests such as the rabid exploitation that defined colonialism, and the disastrous legacies of predatory political and economic institutions far outweigh any secondary benefits that may have flown from colonialism.

<sup>10</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Africa*; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*.

Writing along this line, Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson<sup>11</sup> documented the colonial origins of comparative development. They noted that Europe adopted different systems of colonial administrations and built different institutions in different colonies depending on the colonial officials' perceived habitability of a colony. Where the environment was conducive to colonial habitation, as was the case in the colonies of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, the colonial officials set up enduring and development-friendly institutions similar to what obtained in Europe at that time. In effect, the colonial government created Neo-Europe in such colonies.<sup>12</sup> These institutions persisted and created the foundations for sustainable growth and development in these countries. However, in the case of African countries, Gallagher<sup>13</sup> noted that the colonial officials suffered high mortality rates due to the presence of malaria in the African colonies. Given the high mortality rate in the African colonies, the colonial officials designed extractive and exploitative institutions that could barely support the colonial exploitation and export of Africa's resources to Europe. Instead of European officials migrating to the African colonies in large numbers, European officials made use of Africans to provide skeletal services and focused exclusively on the exploitation and transfer of Africa's commodities. The system of administration led to the development of "extractive" institutions as against "inclusive" ones. Extractive institutions thrive on exploitation of one group for the benefit of another. Such institutions do not support long-term growth and development.

It was lack of long-term interest in African colonies or the absence of overriding desire for permanent settlement in African colonies that led Europe to implement the most exploitative brand of colonialism in African colonies. Those who are lampooning African societies for their seeming inability to make the transition to sustainable growth and development (as other former colonies have made), often fail to realize that Europe adopted different colonizing strategies in different colonies. The strategy could be one that favored the transformation of such colonies to Neo-Europe or it could be those of extreme exploitation, as was the case in African colonies;

<sup>11</sup> Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson, "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation," *The American Economic Review*, 91 no. 5 (2001): 1369–1401.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the 19th Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

or other strategies in-between. Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson<sup>14</sup> show that these initial institutions determined the trajectories of subsequent development and continue to influence the political and economic development paths of the succeeding independent states. This form of institutional persistence has been explained by the path-independent nature of institutions, to the effect that once a particular set of institutions are in place, such institutions produce unique costs and benefits that in some ways reinvent themselves.<sup>15</sup>

While there is no attempt to contemplate kind words for leaders of postcolonial Africa who have unfortunately extended the frontiers of exploitation in their respective states since taking over political power from European colonial officials, colonial rule in Africa institutionalized governance arrangements that rest on exploiting the state's resources for the enjoyment of a privileged few. This perverse governance system has endured, and has sadly consigned majority of Africans to a life of misery and destitution, while producing affluence for political leaders and their cronies. The political system under colonial rule was one that treated public officials—the European officials—as the primary focus of government. Government actions were designed exclusively to advance the welfare and interests of the colonial officials, with the citizens at the receiving end of government policies and actions. For example, the colonial Police Force was an instrument of subjugation and exploitation. Instead of being a protector of the rights of citizens, the colonial Police was an instrument to intimidate, harass, and exploit Africans. This institutional philosophy of government organs persisted even after the attainment of political independence, with the result that what obtains in most of Africa is predatory state-society relations, where the state exists principally to take away resources from the society for the enjoyment of state officials.

Although there have been changes since the end of colonial rule, such as the introduction of democratic elections and some form of advancement in civil liberties and freedoms, these changes have merely been at the margins and have not resulted to fundamental transformation of political

<sup>14</sup>Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson, "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development".

<sup>15</sup>Arthur Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Paul Pierson, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics", *American Political Science Review*, 94 (200): 251–67.

and economic institutions.<sup>16</sup> The result is that the average African state continues to be more of an instrument for exploitation than a mechanism for the pursuit of development and citizens' well-being. The colonial political system did not grant Africans the basics of citizenship—Africans had no say in the colonial administration, and the colonial officials routinely applied draconian tactics to generate obedience to oppressive colonial policies. While colonial rule was different from Atlantic slave trade because colonialism did not involve the sale and transportation of Africans to other societies, European colonialism in Africa could be described as internal slavery because Africans were in several respects not different from slaves, although operating in their own communities.

### POSTCOLONIAL MISRULE

Complaints about colonial exploitation and consequent underdevelopment of the colonies were the common themes around which Africa's nationalists rallied to confront the colonial government, and to push for political independence. Through various means, Africans opposed colonial rule and sought for self-government, ostensibly to curb the exploitation that colonialism represented and to work for the economic development of the continent. Nationalist rhetoric suggested that political independence or self-government would bring an end to the exploitation of the continent by foreigners, restore the dignity of the African, and chart a course for sustainable development of the continent. The nationalist leaders felt that colonialism was the evil that must be eliminated in order to give Africa its rightful spot in the global political economy. Guided by this mindset, political independence became an end to itself, rather than a means to an end. Consequently, Africans came together irrespective of ethnicity or religious beliefs to fight against the perceived common enemy of that era—European colonial masters.

Colonial rule began to crumble in the middle of the twentieth century, with Ghana gaining political independence in 1957, and several other countries becoming independent in the 1960s. Based on the rhetoric of the nationalist leaders and the misconception that self-governance meant the same as good governance, Africans welcomed independence with

<sup>16</sup>Kenneth Kalu, "State-Society Relations, Institutional Transformation and Economic Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 35 (2017), O234–O245. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12320>.

excitement and hope. Expectations were ripe that independent African states would dismantle the exploitative structures set up by the colonial government, and deliver good governance that would generate development and unleash the potentials that were suppressed under colonial exploitation. However, the first decade of political independence produced series of crises that almost questioned the idea of political independence. A few years after independence, the political and economic conditions in many African states deteriorated. Military coups became more of a norm than an aberration. By the end of the 1970s, almost every country in Sub-Saharan Africa was facing one political crises or the other. Civil wars, ethnic and religious conflicts, and general social disorder had become commonplace across the continent. Africa's economy did not fare any better—several failed attempts at industrialization left the countries with burdensome public debt and deteriorating social infrastructure. As the government failed to provide basic social services, public discontent grew among the populace who had looked up to the African leaders to bring about real development.

The development crises in Africa reverberated across the world. Development institutions like the World Bank and the United Nations devoted much attention to solving Africa's development challenges. New disciplines like Development Economics emerged, and several studies on the African condition began to attract scholars and analysts from different disciplines. Expectedly, scholars began to adduce reasons for the continent's development challenges. While some pointed to high ethnic fragmentation<sup>17</sup> as a major drawback to real development in Africa, others suggested that the continent's unfriendly climate and bad weather<sup>18</sup> made it extremely difficult to achieve the level of productivity necessary for growth and development. However, Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson<sup>19</sup> argue that neither ethnicity nor geography could explain the differences in income levels across different countries. They argue that institutions explain most of the differences in income levels between countries, with efficient and inclusive institutions having the best chances of producing economic successes and societal well-being. Continuing, the authors

<sup>17</sup>William Easterly and Ross Levine, "Africa's Growth Tragedy: Politics and Ethnic Diversity", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112 no. 4, (1997): 1203–1250.

<sup>18</sup>Bloom, D. E. and Sachs, J. D. "Geography, Demography, and Economic Growth in Africa", *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2, (1998): 207–273.

<sup>19</sup>Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*.

noted that Africa had been locked in extractive institutions that could not support development. The foundations of this form of predatory institutions were formalized during colonial rule.

If political independence were to produce inclusive institutions, economic growth, and social stability, African leaders who took over political power from the colonial masters needed to first dismantle the colonial structures that were designed as instruments of exploitation and predation. However, subsisting postcolonial realities have shown that African leaders either were not prepared for the task ahead or they lacked the understanding, courage, foresight, and the integrity needed to effectively work for the transformation that would produce real social and economic emancipation of the people. The failure to effectively dismantle the colonial governance structures and to transform such institutions as the civil service, the police, the judiciary, and other government agencies into organs for serving the citizens meant that political independence became mere symbolism with little positive real changes for majority of Africans.

Political independence has been nothing more than the transfer of the instruments of exploitation from European colonial officials to the few Africans who had received some Western education in the mid-twentieth century. The government organs that fostered exploitation, that treated Africans as subjects, and that consigned African economies to mere suppliers of raw materials persisted. As was the case during the colonial era, independent African governments continued in the tradition of using government institutions and agencies to service government officials and their cronies. Instead of creating platforms for economic growth and social transformations for the benefits of the citizens, political independence produced few wealthy and powerful Africans who had control over the instruments of power, while the majority languished in poverty and destitution. Corruption among government officials festered, dictatorship became the norm, and many African political leaders chose the path of living like gods with little regards for the rights of the citizens. In effect, instead of using the political office as platforms to serve the citizens, African leaders treated the state and its resources as personal estates.

The personalization of the state and its resources made it impossible for the state to provide the basic social services expected of a modern state. As poverty levels increased, the citizens grew restive and the state became tyrannical in order to contain a restive citizenry. Part of this perverse arrangements is that Africa has produced the highest number of tyrants

and dictators who have held their citizens hostage.<sup>20</sup> Of the world's 20 most terrifying living tyrants profiled by David Wallechensky<sup>21</sup> as at 2006, Africa alone has nine of these dictators. The continent has also had the largest number of sit-tight leaders who have not only caused economic havoc in their states, but have also irresponsibly ignored the wishes of their citizens. From Cameroun to Chad and from Equatorial Guinea to Zimbabwe, a number of African leaders seem to have assumed the sole right over the political leadership of their countries. As the rulers focus on maintaining totalitarian control over their countries, responsible governance takes the backstage as those in power focus on projects of self-perpetuation, with devastating consequences on the economic and social well-being of the citizens.

In several ways, the African state has generally failed its citizens. Social services are not a concern of the government, and the citizens are left with no option than to chart their individual paths to survival. Disorder, discontent, and survival of the fittest have become the norm, as citizens live like mere refugees and displaced persons even in their own countries. The failure of the state to produce real development and social transformation has meant that Africa is now associated with several disparaging labels that currently dominate discourse on the continent in the international arena—poverty, underdevelopment, diseases, corruption, and foreign aid. These labels in some ways have rightly or wrongly become the defining characteristics of many independent African states. For sure, progress has been made in a few states—Botswana, Mauritius, Rwanda, and a few other African countries are gradually making the turn toward stability and good governance. However, the reality is that majority of African citizens are still under the chains of abject poverty.

It is evident that postcolonial African leaders have not produced the promised dividends of political independence. The institutions that supported colonial exploitation have persisted. State-society relationship across the continent remains defined by exploitation and predation, as the state has failed in many respects to treat its citizens as the true sovereign. Internal dislocation, poverty, destitution, and crises have been the natural outcomes of Africa's arrested development. While changes are certainly happening in some states—for example, many countries have embraced

<sup>20</sup> David Wallechinsky, *Tyrants: The World's 20 Worst Living Dictators* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

democratic elections<sup>22</sup>—these changes have generally been marginal, with the fundamental structures that define state-society relations remaining essentially the same. For example, in states with regular elections, excessive powers continue to reside with the head of state, and systems of checks and balances remain very weak. Without the appropriate constraints on executive powers, and without enhancement of the citizens' rights, these changes have no real impacts on governance. In effect, although elections are being held, some of these exercises have been marked by irregularities, and the incumbent continue to treat the state as a personal estate. Nicolas van der Walle<sup>23</sup> described this brand of democracy that has left little real power for the citizens as “illiberal” democracies.

Given the failure of the state to generate inclusive development and to provide the basic social services for the citizens, Africans have had to resort to different coping mechanisms in the face of irresponsible political leadership. Many have resorted to seeking economic opportunities and better life in other climes, while others have embraced the religions to keep hope alive. Still others have embraced various social vices in order to survive a harsh and oppressive society. Unfortunately, none of these coping mechanisms can provide a good substitute for a developmental state alive to its responsibilities to its citizens.

### LAYOUT OF THE BOOK

The chapters in this volume have focused on different phases of Africa's experience, from European colonial exploitation to the misgovernment that has defined postcolonial Africa. Whether it is the tragedies of King Leopold's iron rule over Congo—an affront that redefined exploitation and inhumanity even by colonial standards—or the succeeding insanity that can only describe Joseph Mobutu's crass exploitation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo following political independence, this volume argues that the lot of the average African has, in several respects, followed the same path from colonial exploitation to postcolonial misrule. What has changed has been the beneficiaries of Africa's exploitation: with colonial Europe enjoying the lucre during colonial rule, and a tiny African elite taking the front row after political independence. In all of these eras, the average African citizen has been left out, as poverty and diseases become a

<sup>22</sup> van der Walle, “Presidentialism and Clientelism in Africa's Emerging Party Systems.”

<sup>23</sup> van de Walle, “Presidentialism and Clientelism.”

common affliction for majority of the citizens. The book is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on different reflections, images and representations of exploitation, colonialism, and postcolonial misrule as captured by previous writers. The second section contains chapters that recount encounters, subjugation, and dominance, and points to several areas of similarities between Africa's past and present predicaments.

The first section begins with Chap. 2 by Damlègue Lare. The chapter examines the extent to which Africa has been successful or unsuccessful in achieving the important task of rupturing the colonial and neocolonial legacies from the point of view of *Matigari*—an important work written by one of Africa's literary giants, Ngugi wa Thiong'o. It is commonplace for Africans to blame European colonial exploitation for all the development failures of the continent. While colonialism did indeed create peculiar institutional challenges that make real development difficult, the question that continues to beg for answer is this: at what point should Africa's agency take the center stage in the analyses of the continent's political economy of development? It has been over 50 years since most of Africa gained political independence. A critical question is how far have African leaders gone in dismantling those structures of colonial exploitation that are often blamed for the continent's developmental woes? As Lare notes, "Ngugi's approach to agency critically asserts the self as a sociopolitical agent seeking to demote imperialism's agenda and erect an Afrocentric personality that emboldens the African subject with power to shake off the docile acceptance of Western political, economic and cultural controls and claim the reorganization and redistribution of economic patrimony and assets to Africans." Sadly, this agency has hardly happened as Africa's political leaders still find it fashionable to run back and forth to foreigners for so-called development assistance of various forms, and in the process, shirk their responsibilities, including the need to devise and implement Africa's solutions to Africa's challenges.

Nancy Henaku discusses Kwame Nkrumah's anticolonial rhetoric in his book *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization* in Chap. 3. Like other literary works by African authors on the subject of colonialism and decolonization, Nkrumah's *Consciencism* calls for the interrogation and rejection of Anglo-Saxon worldviews that have unwittingly placed Africa and Africans as second-rate race. A way to free Africa from this colonial worldview is to develop Africa's home-grown ideas grounded in African history, culture, and circumstances. Unfortunately, as Nkrumah noted, the revolution to free the continent from the shackles

of imperialism has been undermined by various shades of neocolonial infiltrations. Although most African states have gained political independence, these countries are still largely under the influence and “support” of their former colonial masters.

In Chap. 4, Bamgbose set out to correct the wrong the impression that often suggests that African women writers were not active in the anticolonial struggles. To be able to put the records straight, Bamgbose provides a close reading of ten selected poems of two Sao Tomean female poets, Alda do Espirito Santo and Maria Manuela Margarido, in order to bring out the anticolonial activism of these female artists. By bringing out salient threads in the works of these African female poets, the chapter shows that the anticolonial struggles were not exclusive to male artists and activists. In effect, Bamgbose makes a bold attempt to address what can be described as the incompleteness of representation in the anticolonial struggles by African artists and writers. Through a closer analysis of the works of the female poets, the chapter shows that Africa’s female poets were equally drawn to the important task of that era—dismantling colonial stranglehold on the continent.

Focusing on tribalism and exile—two issues that have become commonplace as Africa struggles to provide inclusive economic opportunities and stable social environments for its citizens—Joshua Agbo discusses Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*, in Chap. 5. Through the travails of Makhaya Maseko, the reader is drawn to the condition in postcolonial Africa where self-exile is common among young Africans as they seek better life in other climes due to the failure of postcolonial African leaders to build united and prosperous nations for the well-being of the citizens. In Chap. 6, Michael Sharp recounts the drama and challenges of true reconciliation in South Africa in the wake of the collapse of apartheid South Africa. Although challenges to peace and sustainable development persist in the land, Sharp is optimistic that: “Regime change in South Africa brought about the unbanning of political parties, the release from prison and return from exile of many of apartheid’s opponents, the dismantling of separate development, the first democratic election in the country’s history.” Sharp notes that the changes that have followed the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa have ignited a new sense of hope in the country.

In the final chapter of Sect. I, Mawuena Logan discusses the issue of race, which unfortunately seems to be an underlying thread in all of the systemic exploitation and maltreatment of the Africans at home and in the

Diaspora. As Logan noted: "The history of the Black Atlantic world is a history of 'strife,' as Du Bois puts it, which cannot be wished away or ignored because it has enduring cultural meanings and social consequences." Whether discussing the inhuman treatment of African slaves or the crass exploitation that defined European colonial rule over Africa, the issue of race remains a common thread underlying Africa's encounters with the rest of the world.

Section II begins with Chap. 8 by Daviel Lazure Viera who discusses the Congo under King Leopold II, as well the Democratic Republic of the Congo/Zaire under President Mobutu Sesekou. Although Mobutu's doctrine of "Authenticite" or "Authentic" Zaire was designed to transform the country for inclusive growth and development after a brutal colonial experience, Viera argues that the doctrine not only failed woefully but also reproduced, and in many cases extended the frontiers of exploitation that it set out to dislodge. As the chapter shows, Mobutu's Zaire was nothing different from the crass exploitation that defined Leopold's Congo and the equally repressive Congo Free State under Belgium administration. Through brutal exploitation of the Congo, King Leopold II laid the foundations of what turned out to be a state in perpetual disarray due, in large part, by irresponsible and predatory government whose mission revolves around servicing the fancies of the head of state to the detriment of the citizens. In carefully selected events, Viera juxtaposed some of Mobutu's policies and pronouncements that are basically the same in all material respects with the choices of King Leopold II, the man who "owned" all the 20 million people made up of the Congo Free State, including the land and all the resources therein. For example, Viera notes, "The concentration of authority in the hands of the chief had already been made effective with legislation passed on 15 February 1972, proclaiming that the words of the head of state had legal force in Zaire." This, she argues, was similar to the rule of King Leopold II whose decrees and actions meant that he had sole ownership of the country of 20 million people during the colonial period.

The experience of Democratic Republic of the Congo, as depicted in Chap. 8, is for the most part representative of the African situation. Changes have happened in many cases: the wordings have changed and the rules have different characters and key actors, but in substance the principles remain exactly the same. The changes that have taken place, such as the introduction of elected legislative arms in different countries and the conduct of regular presidential elections, have done very little to

change the underlying principles and fundamentals of the state-society relations that have existed in the continent since the colonial rule. It is the failure to make this required institutional transformation that has kept Africa in similar situation as was the case during the colonial era.

A number of studies have concluded that the participation of Africans in World War II marked a watershed in the struggle for independence.<sup>24</sup> During World War II, European colonial government drafted Africans to fight alongside Europe in the war. By drafting Africans to fight for Europe, the colonial government was indirectly confirming that Africans have the intellect and cognitive abilities to operate at the same tactical level as Europeans, although the colonial rhetoric of that era had condemned Africans as savages who had deficient cognitive capacities and thus, needed to be “civilized.” When the African soldiers who participated in the war returned home, they were emboldened to confront the colonial officials to demand improvements in human rights, as well as to ask self-government. In Chap. 9, Oliver Coates presents another dimension of African soldiers’ participation in the World War II. Focusing on the experiences of the African soldiers who were mobilized to India, Coates recounts some unique experiences of these soldiers. While some of these experiences shaped the nationalist agitations during the immediate post-war period, Coates’ analysis goes beyond examining how the service men’s experiences in India affected their nationalist agitations. The chapter analyzes other equally important experiences of these West Africans and how such experiences shaped their lifestyles even after the war. According to Coates: “This generalized linkage between servicemen and nationalism may take two forms: either that servicemen themselves became nationalists in significant numbers, or that servicemen exercised a radicalizing influence upon colonial politics after 1945.” Coates contends that “it would be a travesty to dismiss all possibility of nationalist influence, but the question here is one of emphasis and balance; Asia left its mark in a variety of ways, of which politicization was by no means the most significant.”

In Chap. 10, Albert Cauli discusses the operation of a major agricultural company that was an important vehicle in the Italian colonial rule over Somalia. Providing in-depth accounts of the funding, mission, and operations of the *Società Agricola Italo-Somala* (SAIS) established in 1920 by one of the most famous Italian explorers, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-

<sup>24</sup>Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*.

Aosta (Duke of Abruzzi), Cauli narrates “the role played by the Duke’s experimental farming program in shaping colonialism in Somalia, which fascist propaganda later symbolized as a landmark in national colonial policy.” Because the Italian agricultural experiment in colonial Somalia provided menial jobs for the Somalis and attempted to take the citizens away from being itinerant pastoralists, it is often lauded as one of the good models of European colonial rule. However, a closer examination of the operations of the Italian agricultural company shows that despite the touted benefits of the experiment, Italian colonial rule over Somalia retained the fundamental problems of exploitation that was the hallmark European colonial rule all over Africa. As Cauli noted: “Although the Duke did not follow the colonial trend of the time and created a dialogue with Somalis, the SAIS’s contracts totally tied the tribes to the company and deprived them of autonomy in making decisions about their lands ... the Duke of Abruzzi still resorted to using forced labour when his Society was faced with a scarcity of local manpower. All these aspects contribute to reshaping the ‘myth of a good model of colonialism.’” This shows that even some of the supposedly examples of “good models” of colonial practice were actually studies in exploitation in all material respects. Perhaps by providing the minimum basic facilities in the farms for use by Somali workers, the SAIS became a model of good practices in colonial Africa. However, this model could only be “best practice” in relation to the destructive actions of other colonialists such as the inhumanity of King Leopold II in the Congo, and not in comparison to what obtained in the metropole at that time. Of course, by the reckoning of the European colonists, Africans could not be given the minimum standard of care accorded to the average European citizen. It was probably this mindset that made the colonizing agricultural company of the Duke of Abruzzi a model of good practices. One wonders how the forceful acquisition of citizens’ lands and the use of forced labor—all practices associated with the SAIS—could pass for good practices. To support his idea of using SAIS as a model of good colonial practice, the Duke promoted various social activities that included building modern villages equipped with bazaars, medical clinics, and schools. However, these social services reflected the typical colonial strategy of the time, based on racist perceptions of the local population. The schools clearly reflected this status, as they were specifically separated: “one for the indigenous children and one for the whites.”

In Chap. 11, Josiah Brownell provides a different context to Africa’s sordid experiences with foreign exploitation and occupation using the case

of apartheid South Africa. Seeking to create a false sign of respect for the rights of Africans to self-determination, the apartheid South African government actively encouraged Rhodesia and Transkei—both African communities—to become independent states outside South Africa. Knowing that these countries could not realistically be economically independent, the apartheid regime used this supposed offer of “independence” as a way out of the deafening cries of marginalization and exploitation which apartheid represented. As Brownell notes: “For apartheid South Africa, the creation of ostensibly independent, but functionally dependent, African satellite states, allowed the settler state to funnel nationalist political ambitions away from Cape Town and Pretoria without disrupting the labor supply that the Republic’s economy relied upon. Apartheid planners hoped the creation of Bantustans could be sold to the world as a form of decolonization.” Brownell’s essay narrates this comical celebration of “independence,” although the world would not be deceived by the antics of the apartheid administration.

In the final chapter, Bright Alozie explores Nigeria’s political arrangements from the British colonial administration to the postcolonial leadership who are more like colonial surrogates. Like their colonial predecessors, the political class who has ruled the country since the 1960s has largely failed to bring the totality of Nigerian citizens to the center of governance. In structure and substance, Nigeria represents everything that is wrong with the European colonial arrangement. The concoction of a forced union of widely different groups and ethnicities from the Northern to the Southern parts of Nigeria without overarching vision for the union has produced deformities and dysfunctionalities across every facet of the country. The result has been persistent tensions and strife as the different constituent units engage in the contest for power and position in a country that has largely failed to deliver good governance to its people. Alozie points to the British colonial government as laying the foundation for the problems of postcolonial Nigeria. According to him, “The spaces created by the colonial ideologies have become one of the insidious legacies of colonial rule in Nigeria. No doubt, the tools of contemporary politics in Nigeria inhere in the conception of the colonial ideologies and politics that followed it. Nigeria’s postcolonial present has been fashioned after the colonial past, and it is such past that has defined the political spheres of morality that has defied political practice today.” The results have been a country that has failed in many respects to deliver quality governance and economic opportunities to its large populations. The joining of widely different

nationalities into an incoherent union and the poor performance of successive Nigerian leaders have sustained conflicts and crises in Nigeria, as different ethnicities are almost perpetually in contestation over how to share the national assets.

## CONCLUSION

This book has provided accounts of colonial exploitation and postcolonial misrule in Africa from diverse perspectives. It has also provided discussions on aspects of decolonization and the need to rupture the lingering colonial legacies. Those who are inspired by theories of path dependency would find a ready source of support in the African experience, because the political and economic institutions set up under colonial rule and that fostered exploitation of Africa for the benefits the colonial government have persisted. Although most of Africa achieved political independence since the 1960s, the fundamentals of exploitations which were the defining characteristics of the governance arrangement set up during colonial rule have not only persisted, but also expanded by succeeding African leaders in many cases. While changes have certainly taken place across Africa, these changes have not fundamentally altered the structures of exploitation, but have notably created a new class of exploiters.

Granted that Africa suffered brutal exploitation during the period of Atlantic slave trade and during European colonial incursion as well, most of the continent achieved self-government over 50 years ago. Despite the attainment of political independence, the lot of the average African citizen has been nothing to elicit excitement and pride, as poverty and diseases remain pervasive. The question that one must ask is: at which point should African leaders begin to take responsibilities for the developmental challenges of the continent? The rhetoric of neocolonialism and associated dependency theory should perhaps give way to active statesmanship where African leaders should assume the important task of taking their respective countries out of the shackles of poverty. Unfortunately, it would seem that the exploitation of the continent has continued, but this time the proceeds of that exploitation are being cornered by African leaders and their cronies, to the detriment of the state and its citizens.

Perhaps it is safe to state that there are no easy ways to change the tradition of exploitation that has defined Africa's political history. This is so because state institutions have largely been used to satisfy the primordial desires of political leaders at the expense of citizens' welfare. The philosophy

of serving the master has permeated most organs of the state; and the path dependent nature of institutions makes it difficult to achieve significant changes to long-standing institutions. That said, African states must reform their politics and governance arrangements in order to make real progress toward economic development. Domestic policy makers in Africa should take a critical look at existing governance institutions and adopt bold measures to embrace developmental state orientation, where the primary focus of state actions is to procure national development for the welfare of the general citizen.

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SECTION I

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Encounters: Texts, Images,  
and Fiction



## CHAPTER 2

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# Rupturing Neocolonial Legacies in the African Novel: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* as a Paradigm

*Damlègue Lare*

## INTRODUCTION

Many scholarly works in African literary circles have debated on European colonialism and post-colonialism to recapture the colonial experience, the neocolonial embarrassing disillusionment, and the havoc of their damaging effects on Africa. The most painful narratives insist on the political shattering of African institutions and the economic dispossession of her resources, but the much-narrated accounts are the wrongs done to her cultural practices and institutions.<sup>1</sup> On the literary grounds, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are to reckon with when these two writers tell in their own geographical contexts the disrupting and disturbing effects of European colonialism and imperial domination on the African continent and Third World countries in general. Ngugi especially has

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Dale Parker, *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literature and Cultural Studies*, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 288.

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been in line with the postcolonial project of African literature that was to question the European ways of dominating and exploiting the Third World nations, Africa in the main. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin posit that “it has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European discourse and discursive strategies from its position within and between two worlds.”<sup>2</sup> But despite the seminal work of Bill Ashcroft and colleagues, Evan Maina Mwangi relocates the debate by asserting in his book *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality* that “[Postcolonial] novels engage in a politics that is more scathing in its attack on wayward Africans than on the imperial West.”<sup>3</sup> He maintains that if Africa has to write, she should write back to self, not to the center Europe. It follows that the holders of post-colonial critical discourses do not agree on the agenda of the postcolonial novel, which, in my view, has not yet ended the discourse on the necessity to rupture the colonial legacies. My analysis of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Matigari* comes in this perspective to say to what extent the novel signals the postcolonial imprints of African agency as the driving force that can rebuff the docile acceptance of colonialism and imperialism and rupture such legacies as economic exploitation and political control. Using Ashcroft and colleagues’ postcolonial literary theory and criticism as methodological approach, I will first explain how the African self operates in the novel as a revolutionary agent—a step toward rupturing colonial legacy. Second, I will explain why writing back to self can also be a way of imagining Africa as the center, thus, creating new room for rupturing the colonial legacies.

### THEORIZING THE AFRICAN AGENCY: A STEP TOWARD RUPTURING COLONIAL LEGACIES

In the postcolonial literary discourses, many critics have centered the debates on the necessity to rupture the colonial and neocolonial legacies by advocating that the neocolonized subject of the Third World countries is in contestation with the ex-colonizers. Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru,

<sup>2</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back, Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, 2nd Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 221.

<sup>3</sup> Evan Maina Mwangi, *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality* (Albany: Sunny Press, 2009), 2.

and Sarah Lawson Welsh assert that the rupturing of colonial legacies is a very apt metaphor to describe the African literary field's capacity to unravel apparently fixed boundaries, whether mental/imaginary or political.<sup>4</sup> Ngugi has ascribed his novel in that ideology and philosophical outlook. His goal in *Matigari* is to problematize historical and contemporary colonial and neocolonial power structures in relation to Africa, as well as to (re)imagine and map out alternative futures both within and outside European neocolonial matrices of power and domination. The African self in the novel beckons an identity assertion of a referential that sees the acting persona as emboldened by a sense of responsibility and locates that responsibility within the ambit of rupturing neocolonial legacies. If change is to take place in Africa to rupture the colonial and neocolonial legacies, the African subject should initiate it, or at least, should be fully involved. Ngugi in *Something Torn and New An African Renaissance* observed:

The relationship between Africa and Europe is well represented by the fate of these figures. A colonial act—indeed, any act in the context of conquest and domination—is both a practice of power, intended to pacify a populace, and a symbolic act, a performance of power intended to produce docile minds.<sup>5</sup>

This statement points to the writer's vision of what he considers the necessity of rupturing the neocolonial legacy, a philosophy he defends energetically in all his novels. In *Matigari* for instance, the eponymous character Matigari, the hero of the revolution, plays that role: rupture neocolonial legacies and guarantee freedom and democracy to the masses. When he became self-conscious of the African predicament he set the goal of confronting and fighting the treachery and betrayal of John boy, an African traitor rallied to Settler William, till final victory, even at the cost of jail. Matigari's battle in the novel proceeds from the patriotic desire to liberate the masses from the assailing socioeconomic poverty and deprivation to which they are subjected and which are the very making of neocolonial forces: "Today, there is no corner of the land where you will not find women looking for something with which to quell the anger of their children and husbands, he said, most of the women are casual labourers in

<sup>4</sup> Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru and Sarah Lawson Welsh, *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (London: Heinemann, 2009), 4.

the tea, coffee and sisal plantations.”<sup>6</sup> This discourse proceeds from the voice of Guthera, a female victim of the vagaries of the police forced into sexual slavery in exchange for the liberation of her father imprisoned for political reasons. The context of Matigari’s struggle lends itself to a socio-political anomy that points at neocolonial imperialist occupation as the cause of the masses’ subjection to oppression, hence the necessity to rupture such ties.

Ngugi’s approach to rupturing neocolonial legacies in *Matigari* falls in the same line as Walter Rodney<sup>7</sup> in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Rodney described the in-depth harm done by European colonialism to Africa at political, economic, and cultural levels, and suggested that it was high time the African rose up and ruptured colonial and neocolonial legacies:

When citizens of Europe own the land and the mines of Africa, this is the most direct way of sucking the African continent. Under colonialism the ownership was complete and backed by military domination. Today, in many African countries the foreign ownership is still present, although the armies and flags of foreign powers have been removed. So long as foreigners own land, mines, factories, banks, insurance companies, means of transportation, newspapers, power stations, etc. then for so long will the wealth of Africa flow outwards into the hands of those elements.<sup>8</sup>

The import of Rodney’s argument captures attention to European colonialism and its survival patterns: exploitation and misrule which should be rooted out for Africa to develop. This is precisely the literary agenda of Ngugi who entrusts the protagonist Matigari with that mission. In this perspective, Matigari displayed throughout the novel a great capacity to initiate action and effect change in the domain of land and property tenure. Confronting the colonial master, Settler William and his body-guard John Boy in a fierce mountain battle, he defeats them and reconquers to the full his house and property unjustly taken by Europeans through colonial enterprise. He therefore undertakes the revolutionary battle that will lead to the liberation of not only his family’s property but

<sup>6</sup> *Matigari*, op. cit., 39.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Walter Rodney (London: Bogle L’Ouverture Publications, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 38. February 1, 2017. [abahlali.org/files/3295358-walter-rodney.pdf](http://abahlali.org/files/3295358-walter-rodney.pdf)

also those of other oppressed masses. Within the framework of European imperial control, agency has one trait that the revolted colonial subject, betrayed by his political leaders, undertakes the revolutionary quest of sociopolitical reforms. Agency, as Ashcroft et al. observe, “hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense, determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed.”<sup>9</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Matigari* bemoans the general *malaise* that the mismanagement of economic resources in the fictional Kenyan society by political leaders (in connivance with their imperialist accomplices) has crippled the sociopolitical development and deprived the owners of property of the right of enjoying the fruits of their labor. By creating the revolutionary hero Matigari as an agent of sociopolitical reforms in the novel, the author displays an ideology that reveals his creative agenda about what he believes can be done to implement change. Agency in Ngugi’s novel conceptualizes the ability of postcolonial African subjects—Matigari, Guthera, Ngaruro, the factory workers, the University students, and the other under-privileged of the society—to effect change. Organized around their hero Matigari, these actors are in expectation of the kind of revolution that will put an end to the social predicament that prevails in the land: unjust property hijacks, perversion of justice in courts and political institutions, and the tenacious refusal by the colonial government to restore to the indigenous peasants and workers their lands that were stolen by colonial imperialists. The very leitmotif throughout the book comes in the form of a question: where is justice in this country? In the introductory notes to the novel, Ngugi says that his novel is based partly on an oral story about “a man looking for a cure for an illness.”<sup>10</sup> This very statement sets off the quest of these agents to initiate actions in resisting imperial power. The disease to be cured identifies itself throughout the novel as the dispossessing of the hero’s properties—lands, house, car—that the main character Matigari lost as the result of the fierce battle the colonialist Settler Williams and his African traitor John Boy waged against him before his retirement in the forest for magical self-galvanization and his triumphal homecoming to revenge himself. Rupturing neocolonial legacies in this perspective will be to end the state apparatus of injustice that translates in the imperialist control of land and resources.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Second edition. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Matigari*, vii.

The hero Matigari is the agent, the driving force of change in the novel. I perceive him both as the protagonist and the hero of the sociopolitical revolution predicted by the novelist in the introductory notes to the novel. He is a hero because he possesses moral and physical traits of conqueror, and has succeeded in speaking truth to the minister of truth and justice, the political authority after the president of the republic. He has also succeeded in bringing changes where others failed to. He possesses bravery and carries out extraordinary deeds. For instance, in part two of the novel, he opened the prison gates and escaped with the other prisoners.<sup>11</sup> His quest for political revolution and social innovations comes through a prophetic vision of a just society, and starts from the remark that in the country there are some who toil for others to prosper and in turn despise their benefactors: "So these five were busy dividing among themselves the money they had taken from the children? So, a handful of people still profited from the suffering of the majority, the sorrow of the many being the joy of the few?"<sup>12</sup>

Matigari's initiatives for change take various aspects: sensitizing people, teaching, and explaining complex situations to children: "... it was Matigari who was explaining complex things to a child, in a language which only a child would understand."<sup>13</sup> It becomes clear that Matigari has embarked on the journey of rupturing colonial and neocolonial legacies, acting as a revolutionary agent. Agency in *Matigari* partakes to the hero's prophetic vision about a revolutionary change that must take place in the fictional Kenya to put things aright. The change envisioned by the novelist and epitomised in the protagonist should restore back the land to the true owners, provide jobs to the jobless, supply adequate education to students, and health services to the sick of the society. The hero Matigari acts as the agent of sociopolitical revolution to bring about these desired changes. He is an active agent. Ngugi develops a communication channel where the acting agent Matigari acts in symbiosis with other characters, Ngaruro wa Kiri, Giceru, Guthera, the children from the slums. Giceru and Guthera act in the novel as informants and advisors, while the children operate as guides and equestrians. To communicate, the agent is vested with acting power by the author to sensitize, galvanize, and mobilize other characters in the novel who share the same vision and aspire to the same reforms: Ngaruro wa Kiri, Guthera, and all the political prisoners.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 72–73.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 125.

Ngugi strategically argues in favor of African renaissance that will sparkle an ideological implementation of patriotic ideals of Marxist revolution. He submits that if change is to come, it will start with an individual consciousness awakening and be imparted to the other members of the society through proximal sensitization:

I will not produce food  
For him-who-reaps-where he never sowed to feed on it.  
While I go to sleep on an empty belly  
I will not build a house  
For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to sleep in it  
While I sleep in the open.<sup>15</sup>  
It dawned on him that one could not defeat the enemy with words alone.  
One had to have the right words; but these words had to be strengthened  
by the force of arms. In the pursuit of truth and justice, one had to be armed  
with armed words.<sup>16</sup>

This extract brings to the fore the hero's reflections about the social anomy that has besieged the country, by turning owners of property into alien subjects and the foreigners into owners of the land and best houses. Ngugi has made the hero Matigari pass through three different stages to galvanize his character as an agent: the forest struggle, the prison confinement, and the encounter with the minister of truth and justice. The three stages represent social metaphors of how the agent operates to attain maturity in the mission toward reforms. I will consider these stages one by one. The first stage, the forest struggle with Settler William, is the struggle through which Matigari experiences self-discovery.<sup>17</sup> It is the transfiguration of the character from commonality of human frailty into superhuman radiance. Matigari emerges as a conqueror from the forest. His long confrontation with William Settler forges in him the virtues of endurance, resistance, and perspicacity. These three virtues produce in him steel-like courage. His unbending tenacity before opposition and adversity makes him qualify as the hero of political revolution in the novel. Matigari responds: "There are two worlds... that of those who accept things as they are and that of those who want to change things [...] There is too much fear in this country."<sup>18</sup> Such a declaration reveals him as a revolutionary hero committed to make change happen.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1–30.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 87.

The second stage, the prison experience, is the literary lab where the author makes Matigari meet and socialize with people of lower social condition, to sense their psychological depression and share their inner sufferings. The prison stands as a metaphor of freedom restriction, it operates as a place of physical humiliation and torture. Through the prison experience, Matigari suffers deprivation, hunger, thirst, and sleeplessness. Solitary confinement has fostered the mind resistance through the meditation on life philosophy, geared toward a liberation from oppression. It is in prison that Matigari has designed his revolutionary plans: the overhauling of the political order imprint by injustice, oppression, and denial of human rights. Being with the downtrodden of the society in prison has made Matigari develop his sense of sympathy and pity for the common people: the student, the vagrant, the teacher, the drunkard.<sup>19</sup> The third stage, the encounter with the minister of truth and justice has brought Matigari face to face with the political authority and unveiled his ethos as a critical agent. He has taken that opportunity to tell the truth about the oppressive nature of his Excellency Ole Excellency's ruling.

Ngugi is part of the African writers whose literary campaigns offshoot the bamboozling colonial enterprise and its neocolonial heritage. What obtains from his critical approach is the deconstructing discourse that rebuffs the docile acceptance of servility. Often than not, his critical pronouncements locate the colonizer as the trouble maker in African history and the African rulers who connive with him rated as the traitors. At discourse level, the novel *Matigari* follows a narratological pattern of deictic style where the narrator adjoins the impersonal reader to get rid of treacherous behavior and servility:

Destroy Terrorists. Look at anybody who is worth anything, be he from this tribe or that; they are all those who have been abiding by the law ever since the colonial time. What about the children of those who took axes and home-made guns, claiming that they were going to fight against the rule of law? Where are they today? Where is the independence that we fought for? That is why they are still shouting at the bottom of the ladder. In fact, it is we who abided by the law who prevented the country from being destroyed.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 54–55.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 103.

Ngugi's postcolonialism is the searchlight that beckons a new outlook for a remedy against the colonial and neocolonial buffoonery that plagues the continent and cripples its development. Rupturing neocolonial legacies emerges as a practical solution to the contingencies of neocolonial adjuncts that reduplicate the colonial mentality, actions, and reactions in the neocolonial space. His political vision bemoans an intellectual deployment of ideas, plans, and strategies that deconstruct the pathologies recorded in the management of the postcolonial African state. When Matigari emerged from the mountains, his first objective was to visit his home country, set things right by taking possession of what he left behind. His attitudes toward children are sympathetic as he takes time to explain to them the sociopolitical and historical contexts of his ideological struggle against colonialism. Ngugi creates Matigari with the ideological stand of Frantz Fanon, an advocate of human rights and justice for the oppressed of the society. Fanon asserts:

History teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism. For a very long time the native devotes his energy to ending certain definite abuses: forced labour, corporal fight for democracy against the oppression of mankind will slowly leave the confusion of neo-liberal universalism to emerge, sometimes laboriously, as a claim to nationhood.<sup>21</sup>

The level of Fanon's understanding of what colonialism has done to African countries earns him commitment for the oppressed just like Ngugi's hero, Matigari. Rupturing colonial legacies for Ngugi and his hero espouses Fanon's ideological stand that a revolutionary struggle be fought to end imperialist abuses namely forced labor, dictatorship, and oppression. These are the very ills that plague Matigari's society and discombobulate the common citizen. Ngugi's narrative verges on classical realism as he so closely delineates and imaginatively constructs the very conditions under which neocolonial compradors of African freedom have pilfered African economies and thrown the continent in a state of desolation. But his realism comes to question not the colonialist enterprise per se, but the actual African connivers who are being used as its puppets. What obtains here is the relocation of the instrumentalism of the colonial and neocolonial agents who have understood nothing of the Pan-African

<sup>21</sup> Frantz Fanon, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961/2001), 1578–1586.

deal that informed the nationalist struggles for independence. What tantalizes the traitors like John Boy and his mentor Settler Williams in the novel is the refurbishment of their rapacious ambitions to hold the greater share of the country's wealth for themselves at the expense of the toiling masses and laborers. I do not totally agree with some critics like Simon Gikandi who fail to locate Ngugi's authorial ideology within the scope of iconoclastic socialist realism. His question about Ngugi's realism does not challenge readership to embark on an epistemological excavation of the author's philosophical realism and his societal commitment:

And so, the question persists: if Ngugi's intention in the novel is to capture social reality, why do his central figures function, in their names, meanings and narrative functions, as allegorical vehicles? The most immediate reason that comes to mind is that the opposition between realism and allegory proposed here is a false one, that allegory helps the author capture social reality in a deeper sense by estranging readers from the banal discourse promoted by the state. This is perhaps true for the novel as a whole, but the Guthera story contains another explanation: that allegory enables Ngugi to transcend the failed economy of nationalism and thus realism.<sup>22</sup>

Here, Gikandi has engaged the reader in an interpretive praxis that reconceptualizes Ngugi's realism and yet he seems not to be sure whether the novelist adopts an allegorical narrative mode or a realistic socialist one. For me, Ngugi's narrative in *Matigari* ignites new pointers for the postcolonial criticism that adumbrates so clearly his preferentiality of allegoric realism—a critical tendency in Ngugi that sets to question postcolonial imperialism that secretly, and at times, openly operates as tentacles of sociopolitical and economic alienation of the masses and the appendage-oriented politics of profiteering rulers. That a kleptocratic center of profiteers like his Excellency Ole Excellence, President of the country and his cabinet have hijacked African post-independent economies and built for themselves a stronghold that keeps all opposing parties at bay, is a truthful rationale that can explain the foaming rage of true nationalists like Matigari who seek the rupturing of neocolonial legacies and the restoration of power to the masses. It is the meaning that emerges from a serious critical analysis of the *Matigari* as a realistic novel. Allegory and symbolism come to reinforce the realistic stand of Ngugi's Marxist orientation. The following passage is useful to explain:

<sup>22</sup> Simon Gikandi, 2001. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 238.

The rest of the people made more torches now from the burning house and  
 they joined in the singing:  
 Their cars must burn!  
 Yes, their coffee must burn!  
 Yes, let all the other oppressors' cars burn!  
 And those of the traitors too!  
 Yes, and those of the traitors too!  
 The property of those robbing the masses must burn!  
 The property of those robbing the masses must burn!  
 Parrotology in the land must burn!  
 The culture of Parrotology must burn!  
 Yes, the culture of Parrotology must burn!  
 Yes, the culture of Parrotology must burn!  
 Nationality-chauvinism must burn!  
 Yes, nationality chauvinism must burn.<sup>23</sup>

This passage is loaded with Marxist discursive aesthetics. Marxism itself is embedded in the social reality and actual living conditions of the underprivileged of the society. A clear indication is the implication of the masses and their revolutionary struggle against those they consider oppressors, the bourgeois factory owners, and tea plantation overlords. The masses are struggling for the collapse of that upper class who, being the owners of the means of production of riches, nevertheless care little about the improvement of the living conditions of these very masses, producers of their riches. The fact that Ngugi has chosen to locate his realism in the mainstay of allegorical praxis denotes the author's desire to deconstruct colonial and neocolonial language and ideological pointers.

The agent has come to denote an insightful character who is conscious of himself or herself as a human being. In this sense, agency is discussed in relation to the objective or goal, which refers to that which is perceived by the agent or that which he knows he is pursuing. The distinction between the agent and object as categories, however, is not stable, and the meaning can change from one context to the next. For example, the agent denotes a self-conscious person, but the object denotes another person whom he loves, hates, and is ambivalent about. As a subject who self-consciously acts and causes change to actually happen, Matigari qualifies as a postcolonial agent who strives to end colonial legacy. He stands as a symbol, a representative image of Africa in the triumphal walk toward the rupturing

<sup>23</sup> *Matigari*, op. cit, 167–168.

of colonial legacies of political control, economic exploitation, and cultural alienation. The way for Matigari has been long, and the battle fierce. Yet in the long run, he has succeeded to emerge as the winner. His sense of abnegation, his love for truth, and his resistance in front of adversity uplift him above the common man and position him as the revolutionary hero. The tropes of the African heroes coming home with triumphal songs after defeating the colonial oppressor recur on regular rhythm in Ngugi's literary works. A glance at *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*,<sup>24</sup> a play he coauthored with Micere Githae Mugo informs the reader about the sociopolitical feats of the hero Kimathi.

The celebration of a true African renaissance comes when the black continent succeeds in ending with the colonial legacies of exploitation at economic, political, and cultural levels. Africa is on her way to that end, and Ngugi's expectations are perceptible through the literary representations of the eponymous character Matigari as a literary messenger, or better, as a literary agent set off to achieve the collective freedom and to reposition the power relationships between the ex-colonial powers and the liberated ex-colonized countries. It is in this perspective that the rupturing of colonial legacies bears its true meaning. Metaphorically, Africa's self-liberation resides in the capability of her children, sons and daughters alike to claim, fight for, and regain what they have lost: resources, dignity, and freedom. It is the freedom to decide one's economic policy, one's political leadership, and one's cultural epistemology. These, as Ngugi makes Matigari perceive, are pivotal to Africa's total emancipation. An agent does not necessarily need to be a subject, however, nor does a subject necessarily possess agency. To clarify matters, agency should not be confused with the term subjectivity. Whereas the subject denotes a self-conscious person, subjectivity refers to consciousness of one's perceptions as an individual or discrete subject. Consciousness of oneself as a discrete individual (subjectivity) does not mean that one has agency or is an agent. Matigari is a revolutionary agent who has been vested with the capacity to act, to effect changes to the bewilderment of the armed forces; as agent, he is the source or location of liberation; he is a self-conscious human being.

A literary understanding of agency in Ngugi's political thought in *Matigari* is informed through an ideological perception of how change can be initiated in postcolonial African countries where the evils of corruption, mismanagement, and swindle plague political institutions and public

<sup>24</sup>Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (London: Heinemann, 1976).

administration. The change is the reversal of a situation that has been so far prevailing and that is rated unbecoming for the people affected by these conditions. These conditions in the novel include oppression from neocolonial yoke, class disparities, misappropriation of people's property, sexual exploitation, and dictatorship. When the prisoners are discussing the general sociopolitical tempo in the country, the common remark is that:

Our country is truly as dry as this concrete floor. Our leaders have hearts as cold as that of Pharaoh. Or even colder than those of the colonialists. They cannot hear the cry of the people ... One of them was a peasant farmer. He had been arrested for selling milk without a license.<sup>25</sup>

These critical observations confirm the political vision of *Matigari* as African critique against neocolonial entanglement:

An even bigger problem is that the people of Africa and other parts of the colonized world have gone through a cultural and psychological crisis and have accepted at least partially the European version of things. That means that the African himself has doubts about his capacity to transform and develop his natural environment. With such doubts, he even challenges those of his brothers who say that Africa can and will develop through the efforts of its own people.<sup>26</sup>

In *Matigari*, Matigari emerges as hero and a self-conscious agent. Consequently, in the mature subject, agency is understood as the ability to cause change or act by making choices. In other words, the subject is believed to have agency because he causes change by choosing among alternative actions: for instance, suffering with prisoners instead of eluding from prison alone. Insofar as choosing was a key characteristic of the agency of the modern subject, Ngugi associates agency with freedom and, by extension, individual autonomy: One became an autonomous subject by understanding and accepting his or her freedom, using reason to make choices.

Matigari is associated with self-transparency, self-knowledge, and rational choice making. Because choice making was understood as a component of human agency, today agency is often associated with matters of

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Rodney, op. cit., 36.

epistemology (how we come to knowledge), ethics (how we discern right from wrong), and politics (how we act collectively in the face of uncertain outcomes). In the social sciences, agency is also understood as a component of one's self-perception as autonomous. Owing to these associations, in educational settings giving agency to students is often expressed as a goal of teaching: by working with students on their communication skills, it is thought, communication educators can help students to better realize their agency and become social, moral, and political actors in the public sphere and in private life. David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, opine that "Ngugi speaks for every African, every Third-world nation in which a morally barren group has turned the whole social system upside-down and sentenced the vast majority of citizens to the strangle-hold of penury."<sup>27</sup>

When Matigari says "My actions will be my trumpet and they shall speak for me. For I will remove this belt of peace and will wear another, decorated with bullets instead of beads ... Let the will of the people be done ... The land belongs to the tiller and not to parasites and foreigners,"<sup>28</sup> he means through this that the persuasive process through which he can engage his listeners to trust him as the liberation hero is to match his actions and his words, I mean his discourses with his political choices. This is meaningful because, the masses on whose behalf he is acting to bring about the desired reforms will not trust and follow him if he does not pass their trial of confidence.

### RUPTURING COLONIAL LEGACIES: REIMAGINING AFRICA AS THE CENTER

By endowing Matigari with the power to effect change in his society and ruling out political leaders as failed agent, Ngugi is addressing a severe critique to African politics. The author foregrounds an Afrocentric view of the postcolonial politics that sees the West as the sole cause of Africa's woes, and Africans as the suffer head on the receiving end. His authorial ideology is an Afrocentric vision of how Europe underdeveloped the black continent and still holds her under the clutches of neocolonialism: "How things and times changed! Who could ever have believed that one day Africans would be driving their own cars? Now all that remained for them

<sup>27</sup> David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of his Writings*. (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 141.

<sup>28</sup> *Matigari*, 63.

to do was to manufacture their own cars, trains, airplanes and ships.”<sup>29</sup> This extract shows irony in the statement. Things not having changed refer to the stagnation of African politics in the state of dictatorship, bad governance, and underdevelopment. This idea is further reinforced by that question: “Had anything really changed between then and now?”<sup>30</sup> Anders Breidlid circumscribes *Matigari* within the analytical scope of rupturing the colonial legacies by asserting: “*Matigari* underlines the deceptiveness of any notion of an epistemological rupture between colonial and postcolonial society.”<sup>31</sup>

### NGUGI’S POLITICS FOR RUPTURING NEOCOLONIAL LEGACIES

The rupture starts with identifying the social unease and malfunctioning and be willing for change to happen. In the introductory chapter of the novel, the narrator foregrounds that this story is about a man looking for the cure of a disease. That very disease is neocolonialism. Characters like Matigari, Guthera, and their friends are aware of the neocolonial predicament and the negation of freedom in the country. As a matter of fact, they have initiated a revolutionary agency: revolutionary agents, the freedom fighters who are not afraid of confronting the political leaders and denouncing the deteriorating conditions of the masses. Matigari has done sensitization campaign against injustice in prison, on the streets, among children and adults with the same message—change must start. Social groups like university students, factory workers, peasants, and farmers are organized in unions and use strikes as their means of fight. Finally, there is a general mobilization of the people aspiring to freedom to rupture imperialist bondage and colonial survival patterns. The resurrection of Matigari at the end of the novel predicts Ngugi’s hope for African victory.

Molefi Kete Asante asserts that Afrocentricity is a philosophical paradigm that emphasizes the centrality and agency of the African person within a historical and cultural context.<sup>32</sup> By this, he means it is a rejection of the historic marginality and racial otherness often present in the ordinary paradigm of European racial domination. To bend his argument to my

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>31</sup> Anders Breidlid, *Resistance and Consciousness in Kenya and South Africa: Subalternity and Representation in the Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Alex La Guma* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2002), 259.

<sup>32</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, “Entry”. In Stephen W. Littlejohn Karen A. Foss, ed., *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* (California: Sage Publications, 2009), 24–27.

purpose, I submit that Ngugi is an Afrocentric who articulates a counter-hegemonic view that questions the application of epistemological ideas taking the cultural experiences of Europe to Africans or others as if these ideas were universal models to follow. In this sense, Ngugi's discourse is a critique of domination that establishes the anti-imperialist struggle of Africans in their own communication sphere. This critique is discovered in the type of language, expressive styles, arguments, literary, or social ideas he disseminates in *Matigari* within an interactive situation. For instance, at language level, the following proverbs reinforce the idea of political commitment characteristic of Matigari's heroism: "A farmer does not stop sowing just because one crop has failed. The seeker of justice does not stop searching until he finds it."<sup>33</sup> Thus, the Afrocentric ideas of Matigari are critical of modern colonialism and its attendant activities by Settler William and his accomplice John Boy who plunder the economic and cultural heritage of Africans or people of African descent. In addition, narrative voices adopted in the novel also add supporting elements to the author's hostile ideology against colonialism: the story fluctuates between third person narrative voice and first person, with abundant use of philosophical rhetoric questions: "where is truth and justice in this land?"<sup>34</sup> "The Father in heaven, why did He create a world that was so upside-down?"<sup>35</sup> "Where is the independence that we fought for?"<sup>36</sup> The critical approach to Ngugi's authorial ideology and the way he constructs the Afrocentric self as the center signal an epistemological advocacy of African affairs as the epicenter of attention. This entails the rule of Africans by Africans and for Africans. This implies, of course, a serious study of the deep structure of African philosophical thought. Advocated as a necessity due to the historical conditions that have removed Africans from their traditional culture, expression, philosophy, and religions, the Afrocentric ideas in *Matigari* seek to reposition Africans in the center of their own historical experiences rather than on the margins of European experiences. In essence, two political situations removed Africans from their own heritage. Colonization through which Europeans took control of African economic, political, and cultural resources; and neocolonialism through which Europeans still remotely control from Europe all resources in African countries:

<sup>33</sup> *Matigari*, op cit., 86.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

“Rumour has it that they have come back with flaming swords in their hands!”

“Flaming sword?”

“Yes, to claim the products of our labour.”

“Just a minute, say that again.”

“The country has its patriots.”<sup>37</sup>

Here, the historical events informing Matigari’s counter-reaction to colonial symbols and his zeal in rupturing colonial legacies are twofold. First, the enslavement of African people brought about a massive physical and cultural dislocation of millions of Africans. Such a large-scale movement did not have mere displacement implications, but more profound implications for how Africans would communicate out of the new reality that was imposed on them? Thus, it was both how and what that mattered in the process of communication among Africans in imperial Europe. The second political situation was the colonizing of the continent of Africa itself, which left people on the continent but already endangered in their cultural, psychological, and cognitive selves. Thus, the disassembly of African ideas, ideals, standards, and methods was fundamental to the making of both enslaved Africans and colonized Africans. The Afrocentric claims that Africans were removed from their own culture in expressive and religious ways is an existential claim based on the reality of the slave trade and the imperial colonization of Africa. When Africans were forbidden to speak their own languages, to dress in their own clothes, and in some cases, to use their own names, they were in the midst of the turmoil of dislocation. Those who were also separated from their familiar physical and environmental contexts were further alienated from their own cultural terms. Tejumola Olanyan came up with the following remark:

The African novel gave decisive voice to African anticolonial nationalism. As African politicians battled the colonial regimes on the war front or constitution-drafting conferences in the political realm, African writers earnestly contributed to the decolonization efforts in the realm of imaginative literature by rehabilitating the image of Africa smeared by decades of colonial racism and by satirizing the colonizers.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>38</sup> Tejumola. Olanyan, “Political Critique and Resistance in African fiction”, In Guarav Desai, ed., *Teaching the African Novel* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009). 70–80.

The quest for Afrocentric location, that is, a place from where the African can view reality and phenomena associated with reality from the standpoint of Africans, is a liberating journey. One experiences the quest in the language and identity of African reality. Characters' voices, words, and cadences in *Matigari* are those of Africans who are discovering their way back to the center of their own histories. Marginality is a place, but it is not fatalism. It is a springboard on which to stand and from which to seek redefinition, relocation, and centering of one's perspective. This ideological stand is unveiled in the following declarations of Matigari:

The builder builds a house. The one who watched while it was being built moves into it. The builder sleeps in the open air, no roof over his head. The tailor makes clothes. The one who does not even know how to thread a needle wears the clothes. The tailor walks in rags. The tiller tends crops in the fields. The one who reaps-where-he-never-sowed yawn for having eaten too much. The tiller yawn for not having eaten at all. The worker produces goods. Foreigners and parasites dispose of them. The worker is left empty-handed.<sup>39</sup>

This is a literary turn that is essential for conceptualizing Africans as subjects or agents within the communication process. If Africans are not agents—empowered actors—in the situation, then the old patterns of marginality and peripherality are maintained. The interaction takes the form of one party taking an active role against another, rather than dissolving oneself into a docile acceptance of neocolonial legacies. Consequently, if the subject-to-subject pattern does not adhere, then the rupturing of imperialism cannot be authentic.

In its attempt to shift discourse about African phenomena from ideas founded in European constructs to a more centered perspective, Afrocentricity announces itself as a form of anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-sexist ideology that is innovative, challenging, and capable of creating exciting ways to acquire and express knowledge. The denial of the exploitative expression of race, gender, and class often found in older ideas about knowledge is at once controversial and a part of the evolving process of developing a new way of thinking about knowledge. Afrocentricity confronts the marginality of Africans and critiques European patriarchy and sexism as a part of the baggage of the hegemonic tendencies frequently found in Western communication. On the one hand, Afrocentricity

<sup>39</sup> *Matigari*, op cit, 113.

challenges African communicators to come from the margins of European reality and to claim their own centered space. On the other hand, in its emphasis on each person's assuming agency and not being trampled on or victimized, Afrocentricity offers a liberating space for the struggle against all forms of oppression.

Majority of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's books written between 1972 and 2016 redefine such critical tendencies that engage discourse in the challenging task of reconstructing African past in the new light of African renaissance. For instance, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature and Politics* in 1972,<sup>40</sup> *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* in 2009,<sup>41</sup> *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Memoir of a Writer's Awakening* in 2016,<sup>42</sup> respectively, added immensely to the theoretical and intellectual development of Ngugi's theory of Afrocentricity. Afrocentricity becomes a discourse that thrust the concept of agency into the intellectual arena as a perspective whose core is the interpretation and explanation of phenomena from the standpoint of Africans as agents rather than victims or objects. Four main stages emerge in Ngugi's writing career and which one can charter with Matigari's life: the phase of romanticism notable in his early writings, the phase of critical thinking maturation, the phase of political rebuttals and his radicalization, and the phase of forgiveness.

### THE PHASE OF ROMANTICISM: 1960s

That period marks the early beginnings of Ngugi's writing career. He focused on the wrongs done to Kenya by colonialism, with special attention to land expropriation, the shattering of African institutions under the attack of colonial enterprise, the metaphors of romantic love transcending cultural and political boundaries, and the Christian religion as the uniting force. He gathers momentum of these issues in *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, *The Black Hermit*. The location of the African predicament is found within, but not exclusively with the colonial enterprise that has historically swept over all Africa like a whirlwind of epidemic plague. The

<sup>40</sup>Ngugi, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature and Politics* (London: Heinemann. 1972).

<sup>41</sup>Ngugi, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*. (London: Heinemann. 2009).

<sup>42</sup>Ngugi, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Memoir of a Writer's Awakening* (New York: New Press, 2016).

colonial contract signed by African traitors through which they sold African dignity, wealth, and identity to the white settler indelibly marked the departure point of the African woes to come. Probing into Matigari's subconsciousness as the revolutionary hero, the images of these fracturing disasters that enslaved Africans' properties, ruptured their ancestral ties and disorganized their indigenous lives keep recurring over and over in the novel. The trajectory of what became later the mind enslavement to which Ngugi refers in *Decolonizing the Mind* as the main havoc imputable to European cultural implantation took place, both in the African lower class, middle class, and upper classes, giving way to the loss of self-confidence and organizational patrimony. The first collection of essays *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature and Politics* contextualizes the circumstances of the rise of the Mau Mau movement, the most important political movement that was to lead Kenya to the revolutionary war of independence. The main argument in that book follows the logic of Matigari that in the face of blatant injustice and the negation of human right to freedom, revolution becomes the final resort, when all options of peaceful negotiations have failed. All but one last mortal blow was given to African institutions by the colonial master in the form of brutalization of Africans and the seizure of their properties. The Mau Mau war of revolution that was fought by Africans became a necessity to liberate Kenya from the colonial yoke. The discombobulation of leadership that was to be observed in Africa's journey toward development is imputable to the colonialism in all senses of the word. Ngugi plots these intellectual reflections through well-organized narratives that engage characters, language, and symbols in an intellectual journey to an ideological settlement of the neocolonial predicament in Africa through a rupturing of colonial boundaries and cultural healing of the mind. But very soon, Ngugi's writing trajectory was going to reach a turning point as he became aware of a most profound cause of African plight: the active implication and determinant connivance of African leaders.

#### THE PHASE OF CRITICAL THINKING MATURATION: THE 1970s

This phase takes Ngugi to a journey of critical thinking toward the African subject especially in a context where African leaders took over from the White men to lead the newly independent African nations. In the critical analyses of Ngugi, the songs of independence that marked out the political

liberation of the African nation-states soon turned into funeral dirges and laments as African leaders formed a betraying coalition to slaughter the hard-earned freedom. The critical book *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Oppression in Neo-colonial Kenya* (1983) came out to sustain the author's ideology. The book just like *Matigari* captures the fact that postcolonial enslavement became worse than the colonial yoke, because in the former situation, the White man may be excused for being a foreigner, while in the latter case, Africans are inexcusable for plundering the continent's wealth and turning life into mournful sorrow for fellow Africans. Postcolonial betrayal becomes salient in such works as *Petals of Blood* in 1977, the novel written ten years before *Matigari* in 1987. Here African history records Africans themselves as being responsible for the woes and throes of the continent, and notes that unless they come to the full awareness of their personal flaws and are willing to change, the continent cannot envisage a reform. What mostly captures attention is the way the author deconstructs the historical legacies of western ideology and the manner in which he makes the African consciousness instrumental in the conquest and repossession of African heritage. Far from leaving *Matigari* in the stronghold of narcissist escapism, the novelist galvanizes him with realism, intellectual stamina that spurs up the renewing forces of a new African ethos. The landing point of the journey toward the rupturing of neocolonial legacies should be the decisive act of self-purification of the sin of stealing that African nations, slaughtering their economies, plundering their hopes into a dark anomy of cynical despair. That is the very role that *Matigari*, the hero, achieved at the end of the novel.

### THE PHASE OF POLITICAL REBUTTALS AND HIS RADICALIZATION (1970–1990)

This period marks what I call the radicalization of political thought in the writings of Ngugi. The novel *Matigari* was written within that period, in 1987. Ngugi came to the realization that while argument cannot be advanced that African leaders are better than the white colonizers in their politics, a formula must be found to strike the balance between the leftists who argue in favor of European colonial enterprise as innocent in African neocolonial predicament and the right-wing counterparts who locate African bafflement within the scope of western colonization. To be exact, the novelist purveys the counter-hegemonic discourse that negates either side as sole indexation in the matter and advocates the argument of shared

responsibility in Africa's underdevelopment. If colonialism is to be blamed, it must appear in court with the African neocolonial political lordship that bar the gate of entrance to all efforts of development and refuse to acknowledge Africa's poor masses as the worth heirs of the continent's wealth. What makes Ngugi take a radical step toward the full implication of African leaders in the responsibility of the continent's woes is the very attitude of some leaders who, not only do remain obstinate in their ways of looting the continent's economy, but equally take the hideous pleasure to attempt to ban writers and their works on the African soil, by so doing jeopardizing the future of the entire peoples on the continent. Ngugi records that when *Matigari* was published, the Kenyan political authorities banned it and declared a state of emergency. Soldiers exercised violence on Ngugi at the airports and raped his wife. Such brutal attitude that infringes on human rights and freedom are also reminiscent of the very enslavement of the masses and their properties. The collection of essays that back the ideological stand of *Matigari* as a radicalization piece of literature is *Writers in Politics*<sup>43</sup> where Ngugi defends the idea that Africans must pass the test of moral and intellectual probity before qualifying as better than rapacious colonial dealers.

#### THE PHASE OF MODERATION AND THE MUSE OF FORGIVENESS: FROM 1990 TILL THE PRESENT DAY

Here, Ngugi seems to soften his criticism by taking a new critical approach to world geopolitics. His main argument is that whatever wrong done to Africans either by European colonialism or African postcolonial leaders, moral obligation requires that compromise be found for history to continue. Off-shooting the legacies that were hailing literary discourses in the hey days of colonialism and that struggled hard to establish African literary canon, the present response adumbrates new signposts for contemporary critical thinking that puts at the very premises of literary discourse the phenomenon of globalization, the reshaping and remapping of national boundaries, and the remaking of intellectual cultural identities. Specifically, African citizens find in the new world politics the migratory fluxes that inform the spatial displacement of intellectuals, the claiming of new identities outside African geographical boundaries and the relocation of interest, as more and more citizens of African descent cross boundaries to find bet-

<sup>43</sup>Ngugi, *Writers in Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

ter living conditions in the global North. To achieve this objective, Ngugi backs his criticism with a new approach in *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* in 2009. In that book, the repossession of the colonial identity seems no more a priority but a nostalgic evocation of what the founders of Pan-Africanism struggled for: a theory of African unification. Ngugi goes beyond African unification in *Matigari* to evoke African renaissance, a total rejuvenation of the intellectual, moral, and material faculties and values more and more inflected toward tolerance, forgiveness, openness to the new world politics, inclusion, not exclusion and the mutual enriching through partnerships. What finally emerges from Ngugi's discourse is the necessity of reinventing the continent, rewriting its story, and reasserting its rights to stand tall and strong beside other nations of the world. Rupturing colonial legacies will be synonymous with redefining African renaissance.

## CONCLUSION

Two key ideas emerge in this chapter. First, the authorial ideology decoded in Ngugi's theoretical writing can be seen as a rhetorical strategy, which is employed to highlight possible ways in which literature can promote the ideas of rupturing neocolonial legacies. Second, Ngugi's rhetorical strategy can be seen to expand and develop earlier debates about the relevance and pragmatic value of African political thought in the context of "Third World" liberation struggles, and in their aftermath. Ngugi's approach to agency critically asserts the self as a sociopolitical agent seeking to demote imperialism's agenda and erect an Afrocentric personality that emboldens the African subject with power to shake off the docile acceptance of Western political, economic, and cultural controls and claim the reorganization and redistribution of economic patrimony and assets to Africans only. From that angle, Ngugi integrates in his critical agenda the current geopolitical realities about globalization and cultural interpenetration, identity mix-up, and border crossing.

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## CHAPTER 3

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# Decolonial Visions in Mid-Twentieth-Century African Rhetoric: Perspectives from Kwame Nkrumah's *Consciencism*

Nancy Henaku

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In the introduction to *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Chrisman and Williams ask that “greater attention” be paid to the mid- and late-twentieth-century Third World liberation theorists like Cabral, Padmore, Nkrumah, Kenyatta and Biko.<sup>1</sup> Following this and Mignolo’s comments on the failure of the second wave of the decolonial project,<sup>2</sup> this chapter discusses Nkrumah’s anticolonial rhetoric in his book *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization* with the view

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto.” *Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 2 (2011): 50.

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that a critical consideration of decolonial rhetoric from Africa can enrich the theoretical substance of contemporary discourses on decoloniality including that of Mignolo. The analysis also seeks to call attention to twentieth-century African rhetoric and its significance, particularly for discussions on the implications that the Euro-African contact has for African rhetoric and comparative rhetoric in general. Besides its decolonial theoretical inclinations, this chapter is also informed by McGee's materialist perspectives, which emphasizes ideology as essential to rhetorical criticism even as it opposes the traditional pragmatic approach of thinkers like Aristotle.<sup>3</sup>

Recent discussions in comparative rhetoric have brought to the fore rhetorical traditions in non-Western cultures including many in Africa.<sup>4</sup> However, there is still much work to be done on rhetoric from different cultural contexts. In the case of Africa, comparative studies are underdeveloped unless one includes research on African American rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> Hum and Lyon explain that research on Afrocentric rhetoric tends to be global, ignoring the many nuances and diversity within African rhetorical traditions.<sup>6</sup> They rightly argue that the global approach to Afrocentric research, exemplified by the works of Collins<sup>7</sup> and Asante,<sup>8</sup> is problematic because it generalizes time, space and nation. In an earlier study, Campbell explains that ethnographic studies on African rhetoric have focused extensively on

<sup>3</sup> Michael Calvin McGee, "A Materialist Conception of Rhetoric" in *Explorations in Rhetoric: Studies in Honor of Douglas Ehninger*, ed. by Ray E. Mckerrow (Glenview IL: Scott, Foresman, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> See George Kennedy, A. *Comparative Rhetoric: an historical and cross-cultural introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Carol S. Lipson and Roberta A. Brinkley, *Rhetoric before the Greeks* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); Arabella Lyon, "Confucian silence and remonstrance: a basis for deliberation." In *Rhetoric before the Greeks*, ed. by C. Lipson & R.A Brinkley (Albany: State University of New York Press. 2004), 131–145; Arabella Lyon. "Sources of non-canonical readings or doing history from prejudice." *Rhetoric Review*. 16 (2008): 226–241; Kermit E. Campbell, "Rhetoric from the Ruins of African Antiquity." *Journal of the History of Rhetoric*. 24, no. 3 (2006): 255–274.

<sup>5</sup> Sue Hum and Arabella Lyon, "Recent Advances in Comparative Rhetoric," in *The Sage Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, eds. By Andrea A. Lunsford, Kirt H. Wilson and Rosa A. Eberly (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc. 2009), 161.

<sup>6</sup> Hum and Lyon, "Recent Advances in Comparative Rhetoric," 161.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel F Collins, "Audience in Afrocentric Rhetoric: promoting human agency and social change," in *Alternative Rhetoric*, eds. by L Grey-Rosendale and S. Gruber. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 185–200.

<sup>8</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Rev. edition) (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

contemporary African cultures—a situation that limits the understanding of the history of African rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> For Campbell, “comprehensive studies of rhetoric that take African cultures into account should be based on African historical records (early and modern) if the integrity of such studies is to be maintained.”<sup>10</sup> A survey of sources critiqued by Campbell shows an emphasis on oral traditions. Discussions on written rhetoric tend to focus on contemporary, especially political rhetoric—which is not very surprising considering the long-standing connection between rhetoric and politics.

While research in African rhetoric is still in its burgeoning stages, it appears that rhetoric from the middle twentieth century (between 1920 and 1970) has been largely ignored. Studies on Afrocentric rhetoric from this period tend to focus on African American rhetoric with an emphasis on the Civil Rights Movement. The middle twentieth century is the period of colonialism and the immediate post-colonial era in Africa. This period needs critical attention from scholars of African rhetoric because colonialism and the anticolonial movement were associated with some interesting rhetorical activities. The liberation struggles in Africa were propelled by a vibrant literary activism. There were strikes and demonstrations but there were also speeches, declarations and writings of all kinds. Newspapers like *The Accra Evening News*, *The West African Pilot*, *The Gold Coast Nation* and *The African Morning Post* became a means through which missionary educated elites expressed their ideas. These newspapers not only served as the mouthpiece of the independence movements but also enriched the African literary and rhetorical traditions. From the comparatist’s perspective, twentieth-century African rhetorics may be deemed significant because they point to the contact between Europe and Africa and the effects of that contact on cultural and rhetorical traditions on the continent. Newell, referring to the Ghanaian situation, explains that dilettante newspapermen in the early twentieth century experimented with genres, narrative styles, voices and identities such that they reveal a great deal about themselves, and about the politics and aesthetics of print culture in Ghana around this period.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Kermit E. Campbell, “Rhetoric from the Ruins of African Antiquity,” *Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 24, no. 3 (2006): 257–258.

<sup>10</sup>Campbell, “Rhetoric from the Ruins of African Antiquity,” 257.

<sup>11</sup>Stephanie Newell, “Newspapers, New Spaces, New Writers: The First World War and the Print Culture in Colonial Ghana,” *Research in African Literatures* 40, no. 2. (2009): 2.

The significant contributions of African thinkers of this period cannot be overemphasized and yet as Williams and Chrisman rightly point out, though Third World thinkers (including those in Africa) in the twentieth century made significant contributions to the examination of colonial and anticolonial culture and politics, they tend to be overlooked by academics intent on identifying Fanon as the founding father of Third World liberationist discourse.<sup>12</sup> Rhetorical practices of African liberation leaders such as Nkrumah (1909–1972), Nyerere (1922–1999), Lumumba (1925–1961) and Azikiwe (1904–1996) are among some of the most influential around this period. The works of these people are often discussed from the perspective of philosophy, economics, politics or social thought. They are yet to be canonized even in post-colonial rhetoric. In the case of Nkrumah, recent works still show the emphasis on economic, philosophical and political perspectives.<sup>13</sup> Rhetorical studies on Nkrumah tend to focus on his speeches or oral rhetoric rather than his writings.<sup>14</sup> Given this context, a rhetorical analysis of the writings of these thinkers can provide fresh perspectives on their works. Moreover, since the middle of the twentieth century is a crucial period in African history, an understanding of the rhetoric of the time may provide some insights into African written rhetorical traditions especially after contact with Europeans.

At the heart of African rhetoric in this period was the notion of Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism, two ideas that are central to the initial attempts by African intellectuals to shift the theo-, ego and geo-politics of knowledge. As far as recent developments in rhetoric are concerned, Afrocentricism is still considered as providing a theoretical umbrella that can cover the specificity needed to completely develop a conversation about the relationship between African rhetorics, cultures and traditions

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 15.

<sup>13</sup> See Ama Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); C Schittecatte, From Nkrumah to NEPAD and Beyond: Has Anything Changed? *Journal of Pan African Studies*. 4, no.10 (2011); Martin Odei Ajei *Disentangling Consciencism: Essays on Kwame Nkrumah's Philosophy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> See Barbara S. Monfils, "A Multifaceted Image: Kwame Nkrumah's Extrinsic Rhetorical Strategies," *Journal of Black Studies* 7, no. 3 (1977): 313–330; Augustina Amakye. *Dr. Kwame Nkrumah: A Quest Hero? A quest story rhetorical analysis of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's Volta Dam Inauguration Speech*. (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011); Eric Opoku Mensah. *The Rhetoric of Kwame Nkrumah: An Analysis of His Political Speeches* (PhD dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2014), <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/9290>

and their relationship with the rest of the world.<sup>15</sup> Ndhlovu-Gatsheni explains that “Afrocentricity is genealogically traced to African ideas and African authors as they grappled with colonial encounters, colonial realities and post-colonial challenges.”<sup>16</sup> He refers to *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization* (1964) as a book in which Nkrumah clearly posits that “Africa comes to terms with itself and create scientific responses to national and international issues.”<sup>17</sup> Mignolo also refers to this period in African history, classifying it together with the liberation movement in Asia, as the second wave of the decolonial project.<sup>18</sup> To him, these movements failed because they changed “the content but not the terms of the conversation” and remained “linked to and dependent from global imperial politics and economy.”<sup>19</sup>

It is not difficult to appreciate Mignolo’s argument. What seems troubling is the fact that Mignolo focuses particularly on Francophone thinkers and in relation to Africa, mentions Lumumba as one of the people who remained linked to global imperial politics through his approximation of Marxism. One wonders what insights references to Anglophone [African] thinkers such as Nkrumah might have on Mignolo’s comments on the independence movement specifically in Africa, especially when one considers the fact that he links post-colonial studies to French post-structuralism. Furthermore, it is perhaps unfair to assess the failure of the African revolution with Lumumba as an example. Lumumba was only in power for a few weeks and he never called himself a Marxist but rather an African Nationalist. Indeed, he considered himself as neither faithful to the East nor West.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, the legacy of Nkrumah might fit the context of Mignolo’s argument. Kwame Nkrumah is particularly significant because he was at the forefront of the global Pan-African and liberation movement in Africa. Significantly, Nkrumah propounded *Consciencism*—a philosophy and ideology of decolonization. Though Nkrumah was non-aligned

<sup>15</sup> Hum and Lyon. “Recent Advances in Comparative Rhetoric,” 161.

<sup>16</sup> Sabelo J. Ndhlovu-Gatsheni. *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013. 37.

<sup>17</sup> Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto,” 50.

<sup>19</sup> Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto,” 50.

<sup>20</sup> Patrice Lumumba is noted to have said that “We are neither Communists, Catholics nor socialists. We are African nationalists. We reserve the right to choose our friends in accordance with the principle of positive neutrality.” See the Marxist Internet Archive: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/lumumba/>

at the heights of the Cold War, famously indicating that “We face neither East nor West: We face forward”<sup>21</sup> and accepting assistance from both the East and the West, his philosophy of decolonization clearly had a Marxist-Leninist influence so that the introduction of *Consciencism*, for instance, opens with a letter from Lenin to Bloch explaining some theorists’ misinterpretation of aspects of Marxism [that is some theorists’ misreading of Marxism as overemphasizing economics as the only element of history]. Even more significant to our analysis of *Consciencism* is McClendon’s argument that *Consciencism* represents Nkrumah’s philosophical allegiance to Marxist-Leninist ideology and that the publication of *Consciencism* marks a philosophical break from Nkrumah’s prior leanings towards idealism—characterized by a right winged nationalist approach known as Tactical Approach—to materialism.<sup>22</sup> This argument underscores the complexity and dynamism within Nkrumah’s ideas and therefore calls for a more critical analysis of texts such as *Consciencism*, which is considered as a central to Nkrumah’s rhetorical oeuvre.

In his book *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with particular reference to the African Revolution*, Nkrumah engages with many of the issues that Mignolo raises (e.g. modernity and its complicity in coloniality). For instance, he disproves many of the arguments in Western philosophy as a basis for introducing *Consciencism* as an African philosophy. Also, while deeply influenced by Marxism, Nkrumah’s *Consciencism* can be considered an Afrocentric philosophy for the African neo-colonial problem. Significantly, he revised the book in 1968 in the light of new developments in the Revolution (e.g. coups, assassinations). When he revised *Consciencism*, Nkrumah was himself in exile as a consequence of the 1966 coup in Ghana. Like Mignolo, Nkrumah seemed to have recognized (in the new edition of *Consciencism*) that the African Revolution had almost failed given, as he explains, the close collaboration between the neo-colonialists and the bourgeoisie in Africa. He explains in the author’s note that it had become necessary to provide a revised edition of *Consciencism* in the light of new developments

<sup>21</sup> Statement was made by Kwame Nkrumah at the Positive Action Conference for Peace and Security in Africa, Accra, 2 April 1960.

<sup>22</sup> John H. McClendon III, “Notes on Consciencism: The Epistemological Break and the Notion of Nkrumahism,” in *Disentangling Consciencism: Essays on Kwame Nkrumah’s Philosophy*, ed. Martin Odei Ajei, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 163–169.

in the African Revolution. It is within this context that this chapter examines Nkrumah's decolonial rhetoric in *Consciencism*. In their call for an examination of Third World thinkers, Chrisman and Williams suggest two necessary components to such an examination: The first is an historical theorization of these intellectuals as exponents of anticolonial subjectivity and the second is a consideration of the theoretical substance of these thinkers, their own contributions to a contemporary anticolonial theory and analysis of colonial discourse.<sup>23</sup> In its analysis of the rhetoric of Nkrumah's *Consciencism*, this chapter focuses particularly on the second component with reference especially to Mignolo's decolonial theory.

My task in this chapter is to provide an ideological and rhetorical criticism of *Consciencism* using ideas particularly from decolonial theory and rhetorical materialism. This chapter acknowledges Mignolo's take on post-colonial studies, as well as Nkrumah's own position on what may be considered as the end of colonialism. For Mignolo, "decolonial thinking is differentiated from postcolonial theory or postcolonial studies in that the genealogy of these are located in French poststructuralism more than the dense history of planetary decolonial thinking."<sup>24</sup> He further suggests that post-colonial critique—unlike decolonial critique which develops from the *palestines*—"was born in the trap of postmodernity" and it is from there that theorists such as Foucault, Lacan and Derrida became the point of support for post-colonial critique.<sup>25</sup> For Nkrumah, most African nations were "nominally independent" because the so-called post-independence is itself characterized by a reliance on and influence from external (mostly ex-colonial forces) and therefore creating what Nkrumah refers to as neo-colonialism. Like Mignolo and Nkrumah, this chapter recognizes that the post in post-colonial (and even those in post-modernism and post-structuralism) is itself problematic; however, the chapter also recognizes that concepts in post-colonial studies are still useful for decolonial criticism. Specifically, the chapter discusses *Consciencism* for its decolonial epistemic perspectives emphasizing what it means for Nkrumah's rhetoric to be classified as part of the failure of the second wave of the decolonial project.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 15.

<sup>24</sup> Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto," 46.

<sup>25</sup> Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto," 52.

Since this is an ideological criticism, the discussion is also informed by McGee's approach to criticism known as rhetorical materialism.<sup>26</sup> Ideology, as Lee explains, concerns the relationship between discourse, power and truth.<sup>27</sup> McGee's definition of rhetoric as "a natural social phenomenon in the context of which symbolic claims are made on the behavior and/or belief of one or more persons allegedly in the interests of such individuals, and with the strong presumption that such claims will cause meaningful change,"<sup>28</sup> is relevant to the purpose and context of this work. McGee's theory is significant because as Lee points out, he was reacting against the regime of rhetorical theory built on the authority of canonical figures and texts.<sup>29</sup> His approach therefore seems significant for analysing texts outside of the Western rhetorical tradition and especially for discussing texts like *Consciencism* that are intentionally ideological and resistant to Western epistemic foundations in many ways. For McGee, "what has been called rhetorical theory' (based on the ideas of thinkers like Aristotle, Isocrates, Cicero etc.) through much of our tradition is not theory at all, but a set of technical, prescriptive principles which inform the practitioner while, paradoxically remaining largely innocent of practice."<sup>30</sup> Significant to McGee's idea is the ideograph, which informs some aspects of the analysis in this chapter. McGee argues that

political language which manifest ideology seems characterized by slogans, a vocabulary of "ideographs" easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy. An analysis of ideographic usages in political rhetoric ... reveals interpenetrating systems or "structures" of public motives. Such structures appear to be "diachronic and synchronic patterns of political consciousness which have the capacity both to control "power" and to influence (if not determine) the shape and texture of each individual's "reality."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> M. C. McGee, "A Materialist Conception of Rhetoric," in *Rhetoric, Materiality, & Politics* ed. Barbara A. Biesecker and John Louis Lucaites (New York: Peter Lang, 2009). 17–42.

<sup>27</sup> Ronald Lee, "Ideographic Criticism," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action* (pp. 285–319), ed. J. A. Kuypers (USA, UK: Lexington Books, 2009), 287–290.

<sup>28</sup> McGee's "A Materialist Conception of Rhetoric," 38.

<sup>29</sup> Lee, "Ideographic Criticism," 292.

<sup>30</sup> McGee "A Materialist Conception of Rhetoric," 18.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Calvin McGee, The "Ideograph": A link between rhetoric and Ideology. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. 66, no. 1, (1980): 5.

The analysis in this chapter is divided into four main sections. Each section discusses one of the significant themes in Nkrumah's decolonial rhetoric: the complicity of Western philosophical aesthetics in the project of modernity; ideology and its essential relation to morality, history and the decolonial project; African socialism as a basis for Nkrumah's philosophical project; and finally, the extent to which Nkrumah's *Philosophical Consciencism* could be described as an ideology of pluriversalism.

### IMPLICATION OF EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHICAL AESTHETICS IN COLONIALITY

Nkrumah begins his treatise with a history of Western philosophy and a subsequent discussion of its connection with specific sociological contexts. This history provided by Nkrumah can be considered as *other* history because it is tainted with Nkrumah's memories and sensibilities as a colonized/neo-colonized subject. Thus, one must analyse Nkrumah's rhetoric within the context of his locus of enunciation—what Grosfoguel describes as “the geo-political and body-political location of the subject that speaks.”<sup>32</sup> It seems significant that even before presenting the details of his philosophy/ideology, Nkrumah deems it fit to examine the history of Western philosophy as a preparation for his own ideas. Nkrumah does this in order to implicate Western philosophical traditions in the project of modernity and coloniality as well as shift from the theo-logical, ego-logical and organo-logical politics of knowledge to the geo- and body politics of knowledge.

First, he problematizes the kind of Western epistemology introduced to the colonial student and connects the education of the colonized to the partitioning of Africa. He explains that students from “English-speaking territories went to Britain as a matter of course, just as those in French speaking territories went to France as a matter of course. In this way, the yearning for formal education, which African students could only satisfy at great cost of effort, will and sacrifice, was hemmed in within the confines of the colonial system.”<sup>33</sup> Significantly, Nkrumah refers to his own experiences as a student at Lincoln and Pennsylvania where, as he sardonically

<sup>32</sup> Ramon Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Postcolonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” *Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 1. (2011), 1–38.

<sup>33</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 1–2.

puts it, he was introduced to the “great philosophical systems to which Western universities have given their blessings, arranging and classifying them with the delicate care lavished on museum pieces.”<sup>34</sup> It was during this period that he developed his philosophical conscience. Nkrumah’s critique of colonial education enables him to point to the so-called enlightenment project as one that perpetuates coloniality not only through existing knowledge systems of the West but also through the colonial elites who were educated on “some theory of universalism”<sup>35</sup> and therefore cut off from their national traditions and roots. According to Nkrumah, it is these elites with their “abstract liberal outlook” who fulfilled the hopes and expectations of their guides and guardians. Like Mignolo, Nkrumah critiques Western epistemological and historiographical traditions for its insularity and its universalist outlook especially in relation to subaltern subjects. Central to Nkrumah’s criticism of Western epistemological traditions is the notion that both history and philosophy can be perverted in the service of the colonial project. He argues that

[i]t is not only the study of philosophy that can be perverted. The study of history too can become warped. The colonized African student, whose roots in his own society are systematically starved of sustenance, is introduced to Greek and Roman history, the cradle of modern Europe, and he is encouraged to treat this portion of the story of man together with the subsequent history of Europe as the only worthwhile portion. This history is anointed with a universalist flavouring which titillates the palate of certain African intellectuals so agreeably that they become alienated from their own immediate society.<sup>36</sup>

Nkrumah’s reference to the “universalist flavouring” in Western history and its consequence for the African intellectual is especially interesting. Through this argument, he seems to be pointing to the disembodiment of the knowing subject in Western philosophy—discussed extensively for instance by Mignolo<sup>37</sup>—but he further shows how this idea creates a disconnection between the African intellectual and his society. What is even significant is his reference to the titillating nature of the “universalist flavouring” of Western epistemology—a metaphor that helps Nkrumah in

<sup>34</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Mignolo, *Epistemic Disobedience, Independence Thought and Decolonial Freedom*, 2.

showing that this “universalist flavouring” is itself an ideological tool [masquerading as objectivity] framing the world view of the colonized subject. Consequently, he calls for an emphasis on the (re)-presentation of history in the new African Renaissance and argues that the (re)-presentation of the history of African society must be (re)-written as the history of the African society and not that of Europe. By calling for a rejection of Western categories of thought (which has Greek and Latin as its basis), Nkrumah calls for a project of delinking/epistemic disobedience in which Africa is re-presented in its own terms. As Mignolo explains “Epistemic disobedience takes us to a different place, to a different beginning (not in Greece, but in response to the conquest and colonization of America [replace with Africa] and the massive trade in enslaved Africans), to spatial sites of struggles and building rather than to a new temporality within the same space.”<sup>38</sup>

One component of Nkrumah’s epistemic disobedience is his critique of the works of “immortals” such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Thales, Berkeley, Hobbes and others. Through his critique of these philosophers, Nkrumah sets up oppositions such as idealism/materialism, socialism/capitalism, rationalism/empiricism, revolution/reform, individualism/communalism—terms that are critical to his philosophical consciencism. Not surprisingly, he rejects idealism, capitalism, rationalism, individualism and reform for their respective opposites viz. materialism, socialism, empiricism, communalism and revolution. Nkrumah’s distinction between reform and revolution is significant because it can also be connected to Mignolo’s<sup>39</sup> ideographical analysis of “emancipation” and “liberation.” For Mignolo, “emancipation” and “liberation” belong to two different geo-political terrains and that “emancipation” as a concept forms part of the discourse of European Enlightenment, whose association with the Glorious, American and French Revolutions of the eighteenth century and later the Russian Revolution has also meant that it does not interrogate the logic of coloniality because these revolutions [both liberal and socialist inclined] were led by a bourgeois leadership that will be central to the colonization of non-Europeans. Most significantly, he argues, there is a contradiction inherent in emancipation’s connection with the logic of modernity: “Modernity includes a rational ‘concept’ of emancipation that we affirm and subsume. But, at the same time, it develops an irrational myth, a

<sup>38</sup> Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto,” 45.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Mignolo, ‘DELINKING,’ *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 449–514.

justification for genocidal violence.”<sup>40</sup> The term “liberation,” on the other hand, “emerged in the process of de-centering the universal emancipating claims in the projects grounded in the liberal and socialist traditions of the European enlightenment” and “is therefore a project that delinked from the colonial matrix of power.”<sup>41</sup>

For Nkrumah, reform is a continuation of the fundamental principle underlying capitalism or colonialism but with “a tactical change in the manner of the expression of the fundamental principle.”<sup>42</sup> It is not a change in ideology of thought but of idiom or expression [just as emancipation]. Neo-colonialism is like that because it gives you a sense of being independent but it is not. It is therefore dangerous than colonialism. That is why it is metaphorically classified as “a latter-day harpy monster which entices its victims with sweet music.” Negative forces (mainly African intellectuals who are bought by the colonialists to perpetuate neo-colonialism) become “political wolf masquerading in sheep clothing... like wasting disease they seek from the inside to infest, corrupt, pervert and thwart the aspirations of the people.”<sup>43</sup> Nkrumah’s metaphors for colonialists [“happy monster”] and African intellectuals [“wolf masquerading in sheep clothing”, “wasting disease”] further frame for his audience what he considers as the contradictory and duplicitous image of both groups but most importantly, terms such as monster and disease evoke negative reactions because of their respective association with violence and corruption. For instance, the description of the colonialists as monstrous emphasizes the violence that Nkrumah’s argument seems to connect with the project of modernity. For Nkrumah, liberation is only possible through revolution, which is not only a refutation of an old but also a creative contestation for a new order.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, throughout *Consciencism*, Nkrumah uses ideographs such as liberation, emancipation and independence. While he uses these terms interchangeably, he recognizes that there is a distinction between true liberation/emancipation and a false one.

In relation to democracy and egalitarianism, Nkrumah critiques Plato and Aristotle especially for their implication in the project of modernity. Nkrumah argues that Plato’s ideas in *The Republic* adumbrates a totalitarianism of intellectuals and propagates eugenics. Greek democracy

<sup>40</sup>Walter Mignolo, ‘DELINKING,’ 454.

<sup>41</sup>Walter Mignolo, ‘DELINKING,’ 455.

<sup>42</sup>Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 72.

<sup>43</sup>Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 101.

<sup>44</sup>Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 34.

is also critiqued for not embracing all resident adults and for not redistributing wealth. This allows Nkrumah to critique slavery, arguing that the availability of slave labour was the reason why the free citizenry were not oppressed. Nkrumah's criticism of Plato's ideas is significant to his decolonial rhetoric because it allows him to trace the genealogy of coloniality, causing him to eventually connect slavery with capitalism. Nkrumah argues that Plato's ideas served as the basis of the church's theological explanation of the cosmos and allowed priests to set about acquiring an empire and political power. In league with the aristocrats, the church plunged Europe into the Dark Ages and the most terrible feudalism. Later in Chap. 3, he argues that "capitalism is a development by refinement from feudalism, just as feudalism is a development by refinement from slavery."<sup>45</sup> In so doing, Nkrumah develops a logical equation that shows a progression from slavery to feudalism to capitalism. The consequence of this argument is that slavery becomes the basis of capitalism and becomes a reason for which Nkrumah rejects capitalism. Related to Nkrumah's argument about the connection between slavery and capitalism is his critique of Aristotelean ideas for its failure to interrogate the inequality of women as well as the exploitation of labour through his "superstitious reverence of facts."<sup>46</sup> Significant in Nkrumah's point here is his critique of Aristotle and Plato's representation of their subjective ideas as "facts"/"truth" / "nature[al]." Through such a critique, Nkrumah interrogates the myth of universality that justifies the logic of coloniality, questioning what he perceived as the static representation of society by both Plato and Aristotle. As part of his critique of the complicity of Western philosophical foundation in the project of modernity, Nkrumah references, among other examples, Aristotle's argument that democracy is a natural way for organizing human society and therefore claiming perfection while failing to critique slavery as a problematic institution:

Man says Aristotle, aims at the good. But how can a continuing slave be said to aim at anything? According to Aristotle, the principle of order in a political society is justice, the bond of men in states. But what justice can slaves be said to enjoy? Aristotle, usually tough-minded, becomes all too delicate when he writes about slavery. At the same time, his writings about slavery have been distorted. When he defines a slave as someone who is by nature not his own but another's, a human being and yet a possession, is he implying that there

<sup>45</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 72.

<sup>46</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 45.

can be men who by their own nature as men are not their own but others? A man cannot be discovered to be a slave through an examination of his nature. What Aristotle means is that if someone is a slave, then it follows that he is not his own but another's, a human being and yet a possession.<sup>47</sup>

Through this genealogical account, Nkrumah links the very basis of European civilization to coloniality. While Nkrumah recognizes that some good intentions might be found in European epistemological tradition, his critique undoubtedly brings to the fore the totalitarian bent in this tradition. Significantly, through such an analysis Nkrumah brings to the fore the socio-political and ethical implication that Western epistemological tradition has had on the project of Western modernity. By the end of his discussion on the historiography of Western philosophy, it comes as no surprise that Nkrumah suggests that twentieth-century philosophy is "effectively emasculated" through its refusal to comment on social oppression or progress, "serenely settling down to a compilation of a dictionary of sentences" and "engulfed in their intellectual hermitage." Nkrumah's metaphorical description of Western epistemology as emasculated highlights the inability of this project to lead to the political change needed to totally free subalterns and that is why for Nkrumah,

however desiccated the new passions of some Western philosophers are, they can admittedly claim to share a continuity with European cultural history. *A non-Western student of philosophy has no excuse, except a paedentic one, for studying Western philosophy in the same spirit. He lacks even the minimal excuse of belonging to the cultural history in which the philosophies figure.* It is in my opinion that when we study a philosophy which is not ours, we must see it in the context of the intellectual history to which it belongs, and we must see it in the context of the milieu in which it was born. That way, we can use it in the furtherance of the cultural development and in the strengthening of our human society<sup>48</sup> [emphasis mine].

## THE ESSENCE OF IDEOLOGY TO THE AFRICAN DECOLONIAL PROJECT

Since Nkrumah enjoins colonized subjects not to fervidly study Western philosophy, he provides an alternative as a way out. He emphasizes ideology and its relation with philosophy and morality. Nkrumah argues that

<sup>47</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 45–46.

<sup>48</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 55.

“philosophy admits of being an instrument of ideology”<sup>49</sup> and that every society has dominant ideology whose fundamental principles produce a network of purposes, determining what is possible or impossible. For him, “one can compromise over programme, but not over principle. Any compromise over principle is the same as an abandonment of it.”<sup>50</sup> Nkrumah connects morality to ideology and it is here that one begins to understand the ethical dimension of his philosophy. According to Nkrumah, “morality is a network of principles and rules for the avoidance and appraisal of conduct. And upon these rules and principles we constantly fall back.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, after critiquing Western philosophical foundations for its insularity, Nkrumah can only seem persuasive if he is able to provide an ideology that counters Western epistemology by appealing to ethics. Significantly, Nkrumah argues that imperialism can only end when there is nationalist awakening and an alliance of progressive forces. This is where the connection between morality and ideology becomes apparent. Ideology, according to Nkrumah, is a social theory, political theory and moral theory. For him, ideology is total and manifests itself in the class structure, literature, arts, history and religion of the people. Ideology, according to Nkrumah, unites the members of a society towards a definite goal and provides, in a formal sense, the coercive instruments or, in intent, cohesive instruments for ensuring that this happens. While acknowledging difference, Nkrumah suggests that certain behaviour must be curtailed. Nkrumah seems to prefer socialization through more subtle forms of cohesion such as the arts, history and philosophy. Thus, Nkrumah seems to prefer the more symbolic (cohesion) means of harmonizing society than the more direct and painful path (coercion). Indeed, the rhetoric that Nkrumah produces is itself part of the cohesive elements he isolates. Through this, he hopes to change beliefs which will subsequently lead to a change in behaviour and society. This supports McGee’s argument that rhetoric and ideology are linked and “that the linkage should produce a description and explanation of dominant ideology, of the relationship between the “power” of a state and the consciousness of the people.”<sup>52</sup> The cohesive is preferable because from Lee’s perspective, rhetoric (replace with cohesive elements) is the

<sup>49</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> McGee, “The Ideograph: A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology”, 15.

most ethical though it is also coercive.<sup>53</sup> It is significant to point out that Nkrumah's argument for curtailing certain kinds of attitude stems from the Africans' experience with the colonial wound. For instance, Nkrumah argues that the connection between ideological standpoint and the writing of history is continual because he recognizes, like Said, that Western epistemology patronized and essentialized non-Western [in this instance, the African] experience. According to Nkrumah, European representation of Africa is loaded with "malicious myths" that even suggested that Africans were not a historical people; and that Africans were only propelled into history by the European contact.<sup>54</sup> For him, such patronizing accounts of Africans are the basis of the salvationist rhetoric that justifies the project of coloniality/modernity in Africa:

Earlier on, such disparaging accounts had been given of African society and culture as to appear to justify slavery, and slavery posed against these accounts, seemed a positive deliverance of our ancestors. When the slave trade and slavery became illegal, the experts on Africa yielded to the new wind of change, and now began to present African culture and society as being so rudimentary and primitive that colonialism was a duty of Christianity and civilization. Even if we were no longer on the evidence of our skulls, regarded as the missing link, unblessed with the art of good government, material and spiritual progress, we were still regarded as representing the infancy of mankind. Our highly sophisticated culture was said to be simple and paralyzed by inertia, and we had to be encumbered by tutelage.<sup>55</sup>

Nkrumah interrogates this simplistic bifurcation of the world in which the other's (the African) complete erasure from history formed the basis of the enlightenment project in Africa. Like Said's *Orientalism*, Nkrumah's work suggests that the distorted presentation of Africans was the rationale for the colonial project and that "the movements for decolonization must from the early twentieth century onwards provoke a fundamental crisis within the Orientalist thought."<sup>56</sup> Nkrumah believes that the perversion and failure of the nationalist movement in Africa is connected to the representation of African history in terms of European interests. Given African

<sup>53</sup> Lee's, "Ideographic Criticism", 293.

<sup>54</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 62.

<sup>55</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 63.

<sup>56</sup> G. K. Bhambara, "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues" *Postcolonial Studies* 17, no 2. (2014): 116.

peoples' experience with colonialism and slavery (and in effect capitalism), it is little wonder that Nkrumah would choose socialism as the ideological standpoint for his philosophical consciencism. Subscribing to capitalism seem unethical to Nkrumah because of its connection to domestic slavery. Socialism, per his line of argument, can lead to the restoration of African humanism and egalitarianism and in that sense, a more ethical humanistic project. However, given Mignolo's insightful analysis of the implication of Marxism in the project of modernity, one wonders the extent to which Nkrumah's heavy reliance on Marxism impacts the ability of his decolonial programme to be an effective liberatory tool.

### SOCIALISM: PHILOSOPHY FROM THE RUINS OF AFRICAN ANTIQUITY

Nkrumah's acceptance of socialism is based on the argument that it was originally the form of organization in traditional African societies. He argues that in traditional Africa man is a spiritual being endowed with inward dignity, integrity and value. It is within this that the basis of African communalism is established. For Nkrumah, the significance of the clan within African societies does not provide room for Marxian classes to arise. While Marx and Engels' influence on Nkrumah's philosophy is evident, by arguing that communalism or socialism is the basis of African traditional society, Nkrumah suggests that socialism was already the way by which Africans organized themselves and, in comparison to capitalism, socialism was therefore the norm in Africa. Such an argument suggests that socialism is therefore not new to Africa and that employing socialism is just going back to the socio-political structure of Africa's past. Of course, Nkrumah's argument about socialism is connected to his Marxist-Leninist influences; however, by suggesting that socialism is African, Nkrumah seems to be delinking from socialism's Eurocentric history. Here, it seems that the crisis of being a (neo-)colonized subject advocating for a relinking with "Africanness" within a Eurocentric programme becomes evident and the question that one might ask, especially within the context of Mignolo's comment on the failure of decolonialization, will be the extent to which Nkrumah's programme could be considered decolonial. From a practical perspective, one sees how this line of argument helps him to develop the logic of his argument. By referring to socialism as indigenous to traditional Africa, Nkrumah can argue that economic and political subjugation

was not in tune with traditional African notions of egalitarianism of man and society. He can subsequently blame Western colonialism and its knowledge systems for transforming Africa into a place where as he indicates “the fruits of labour” is alienated from those whose toil and sweat produced it in the first place. It is from such a rhetorical foundation that he can now conclude that capitalism seems irrational because it goes against the natural cause-effect that exists even within nature. This ultimately allows Nkrumah to connect binaries such as oppressor/oppressed, exploiter/exploited to master/slaves, lords/serfs. Significantly, these terms are ideographs that evoke the colonial distinction between the metropole and the periphery. Through these ideographs, Nkrumah is able to show, through his rhetoric, the reality of the current state of Africa in capitalism as oppressed. He argues that the African notion of man is “refreshingly” opposed from the Christian theological notion of the original sin and the degradation of man. According to him, in African society, the welfare of the people was supreme and that subjugation is not in tune with African egalitarianism. This, according to him, is not the case with capitalism which thrives on slavery. For Nkrumah, Africa can achieve true liberation only by returning to the ethics of African egalitarianism. Within a more contemporary and technological context, scientific socialism, he argues, is the means to achieve the transformation that philosophical consciencism hopes to actualize. This point recalls, Mignolo’s argument that “de-linking could hardly be thought out from a Marxist perspective, because Marxism offers a different content but not a different logic.”<sup>57</sup> It is possible to argue that Nkrumah somehow get out of this quandary by suggesting that a socialist ethos is native to Africa—such an argument seem to suggest that socialism is not the birthright of any one human society.

### PHILOSOPHICAL CONSCIENCISM: IDEOLOGY OF PLURIVERSALISM?

Pluriversality is one of the significant concepts associated with decolonial theory. As a term, pluriversality is employed by decolonial theorists as an alternative to the kind of abstract universality associated with coloniality. According to Grosfoguel, “the need for a common critical language of decolonization requires a form of universality that is not anymore a

<sup>57</sup> Mignolo, “Delinking”, 462.

monologic, monotopic imperial global/universal design, from the right or left, imposed by persuasion or force to the rest of the world in the name of progress or civilization.”<sup>58</sup> Pluriversalism then emphasizes plurality, heterogeneity and globalization—ideas that seem applicable in Nkrumah’s arguments as well. For instance, Nkrumah argues that foreign influences have drastically impacted Africa and have especially been pivotal in sowing the seeds of capitalism in traditional society. However, he does not provide a fundamentalist argument that rejects these cultures in his programme. Nkrumah identifies three significant influences in contemporary African societies: African traditional culture, Christianity and Islam. Instead of calling for an outright rejection of what is not “traditionally” African, he advocates for the *harmony* of these three elements despite their “competing ideologies.” Nkrumah argues:

African society has one segment which comprises our traditional way of life; it has a second segment which is filled by the presence of Islamic tradition in Africa; it has a final segment which represents the infiltration of the Christian tradition and culture of Western Europe into Africa, using colonialism and neo-colonialism as its primary vehicles. These different segments are animated by competing ideologies. But since society implies a certain dynamic unity, there needs to emerge an ideology which, genuinely catering for the needs of all, will take the place of the competing ideologies, and so reflect the dynamic unity of society, and be the guide to society’s continual progress.<sup>59</sup>

For him, it is only when these are harmonized that the presence of foreign elements will be in tune with the humanistic principles of traditional African society. Significantly, Nkrumah distinguishes between the old and new Africa. He says that contemporary African society is a new society enlarged by the Islamic influence and Euro-Christian traditions. In his own words, “consciencism is the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest the Western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality.”<sup>60</sup> Significant is the emphasis on the *unity, harmony, co-existence* of these conflicting elements

<sup>58</sup> Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Postcolonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality”, n.p.

<sup>59</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 68.

<sup>60</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 79.

in African society. In that sense, it can be considered in terms of Mignolo's pluriversalism. But it is also significant that while he calls for this unity, he suggests that the other elements must be "accommodated as the experiences of traditional African society." Otherwise, the contemporary African society would be racked by schizophrenia. The difference between Mignolo's pluriversalism and Nkrumah's philosophical consciencism is the fact that for Nkrumah, though the various elements must be allowed to co-exist, these elements must be harmonized to fit into one personality—the African. The notion of an African personality has been significant to Nkrumah's ideas and significantly, during his speech on the eve of Ghana's independence, Nkrumah indicated that "we are going to create our own African personality and identity."<sup>61</sup> Though there is a recognition of the plurality of identities in contemporary Africa, these many influences must be harmonized. This makes Nkrumah's philosophy monistic. Thus, Nkrumah's philosophy seeks to appropriate the foreign influences rather in perpetuating the African personality. It is also this notion of philosophical monism that causes Nkrumah to suggest the creation of a united states of Africa.

While Nkrumah calls for the harmonizing of foreign elements with that of traditional African personality, his suggestion is not based on "inclusiveness" as used by Mignolo but it is syncretism, in which foreign elements are clearly visible and yet are in harmony/at peace with African traditional systems. Syncretism becomes the basis on which the new Africa is created. Syncretism allows for the development of each individual but prevents the creation of diversities that destroy the egalitarian basis of the new Africa. Nkrumah's philosophy is meant to transcend the essentialization of difference. Though Nkrumah's ideas differ from Mignolo's pluriversalism, it fundamentally espouses some kind of utopianism (ideal society). The emphasis on harmony, unity, co-existence points to this. Happiness is, for instance, significant to Nkrumah's ideas and could be considered as one of the ideographic elements that frames Nkrumah's critique of capitalism and connects his programme to socialism. Nkrumah's interest in happiness is evident in his government the Convention People's Party's (CPP) Work and Happiness Program of 1962. For Nkrumah, happiness is defined in

<sup>61</sup> Kwame Nkrumah. *Ghana is Free Forever*. Speech delivered on the eve of Ghana's Independence. Available: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/focusonafrika/news/story/2007/02/070129\\_ghana50\\_independence\\_speech.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/focusonafrika/news/story/2007/02/070129_ghana50_independence_speech.shtml)

the context of society and that capitalism denies many happiness. For him, socialism is a means to achieve happiness for all the people. As he says “capitalism is unjust; in newly independent countries it is not only too complicated to be workable, it is alien” but under socialism, “the study and mastery of impulse of nature has humanist impulse, and is directed not towards a profiteering accomplishment, but the affording of the ever-increasing satisfaction for the material and spiritual needs of the greatest number.”<sup>62</sup> The use of words such as happiness, unity and harmony is ideographic, as they become a basis by which Nkrumah justifies the philosophy that he espouses. This represents what Nkrumah wants as the normative collective commitment of Africans. In this sense, Nkrumah’s utopianism cannot be idealistic but materialist in outlook. That is why he chooses empiricism over rationality and based on this, provides a set of theoretic terms that together create an algorithm for decolonization and development in a newly independent African state. For him, practice is as important as thought and vice versa. This raises questions about the failure of his regime in Ghana and how one might assess the revolution in Africa. In this sense then, as Mignolo suggested, the decolonial project of the nationalist movement failed. But it is also significant that provided with hindsight and very practical experience as a statesman, Nkrumah was willing to revise his ideas in the light of new developments. In so doing, he hoped to salvage the African revolution but whether this could have been possible or not is perhaps a question that we may never be able to answer.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has pointed out some of the relevant discursive strategies and ideas explored in Nkrumah’s decolonial rhetoric in *Consciencism*. It has shown that Nkrumah dealt with many of the issues that have been central to decolonial critique. It makes sense then to argue that more recent discussions of decolonial rhetoric and thought in Africa must necessarily work on re-discovering and re-reading materials from the African “decolonial” archives to be able to theorise appropriately the (dis)continuities in the genealogy of African decolonial rhetoric and most significantly, ascertain what remains significant in the light of new developments in Africa and the world, especially in the face of contemporary globalism. In a more

<sup>62</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 76.

comparatist framework, this work brings to the fore the need to provide comparative studies on liberation or revolutionary rhetoric not only from different regions in Africa, but also from the Caribbean and United States. Significantly, each of these liberation rhetors was not an island unto himself, but each was in contact with others. For instance, Nkrumah had contact not only with Fanon, Dubois and Padmore but also with Azikiwe and Lumumba. It will be interesting to see the convergences and divergences that a comparative study might provide as far as an Afro-centric decolonial project is concerned. Having said this, it is also significant to refer to what it means for the African decolonial project to be part of what Mignolo refers to as the second wave of the decolonial project. One issue that is emphasized in *Consciencism* is that “practice without thought is blind: thought without practice is empty.”<sup>63</sup> Just as Nkrumah emphasizes ideology (thought), he also emphasizes practice. That is why he will provide theoretic terms that together work as an algorithm for decolonialization in Africa. How might Nkrumah’s practices be a basis for assessing the failure of his decolonial project especially within the Ghanaian context? As indicated earlier, this is a question that is perhaps difficult to answer. But it is also significant that when Nkrumah published the revised version of *Consciencism*, the failure of the African revolution was already apparent. This plunged Africa into the years of disillusionment featured in many post-colonial African literary texts such as Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* and Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*. It is in the face of this that Nkrumah hopes *Consciencism* can help turn things around. In this sense then, *Consciencism* fits McGee’s definition of rhetoric. First, one sees clearly the relationship between truth, discourse and power in Nkrumah’s rhetoric. And truth as depicted within the rhetoric of the text is seen from Nkrumah’s locus of enunciation as a [former] revolutionary leader. Secondly, Nkrumah’s rhetoric is a natural social phenomenon because it points to the experiences of Nkrumah as the speaker and that of fellow Africans and the historical moment at which the discourse takes place—colonial, post-colonial or neo-colonial period. Also, Nkrumah’s rhetoric can be considered as coercive [and also cohesive] but it is a subtle kind meant to change minds rather than lead to violent pain. Nkrumah wants to ensure that his rhetoric leads to some kind of change based on the belief in the acceptance of socialism rather than capitalism. Finally,

<sup>63</sup> Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 78.

Nkrumah's rhetoric points to McGee's idea that rhetoric takes place on the premise that it can lead to social change. Nkrumah's rhetorical effects seem to point to a cause-and-effect relationship—the idea that philosophical consciencism, as an ideology, can lead to the harmonization of the various distinct elements within the new African society. This then leads to a sense of collectivity based on positive action rather than negative action and can therefore lead to meaningful social change. Thus, Nkrumah's rhetoric suggests that rhetorical transactions, as Lee<sup>64</sup> explains, create a discourse that reveals the world in which we live as one that is shaped by ideological commitments that we share.

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<sup>64</sup> Lee, "Ideographic Criticism," 294–295.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# Images of Colonialism in the Text of Two African Female Poets

*Gabriel Bámbgbóṣé*

This chapter calls attention to the first chapter of Romanus Egudu's canonical text on postcolonial African poetry, *Modern African Poetry and the African Predicament*, which is titled "Images of Colonialism."<sup>1</sup> In the chapter, Egudu argues that African poets use imagery as a powerful vehicle for the representation of colonial forces and the tragic history of the African past. His argument is based on the remarkable thesis that like other genres of art, poetry "is a compendious symbol of diverse reactions – mental and emotional – organized by the force of imaginative response to what had been, what is, and what will be."<sup>2</sup> Egudu therefore surmises that to read modern African poets' writing is to enter into "varying imaginative and emotional exhibitions that are held together by a central theme – colonialism – which has had a terrible impact on their life

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<sup>1</sup> Romanus Egudu, *Modern African Poetry and the African Predicament* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8.

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and culture.”<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that Egudu’s fascinating work promises a literary survey of African poets’ responses to the issue of colonialism in a balanced perspective. In other words, the essay establishes itself as a total image of the poetic oeuvre of anticolonial ideological sentiments produced in Africa. However, this promise is not delivered.

In this chapter, I read the incompleteness of Egudu’s project through gender lens to question its androcentric perspective. Using Egudu’s work as a point of departure, I want to ask: Why is women’s poetic imagination erased from the critical representation of poetry on anticolonial struggles? What are the implications of such a denial of the female poetic knowledge? And if we take another critical look at female poetic production in Africa in relation to anticolonial poetics, what view of the canon of modern African poetry as counter-imagination to colonial imaginaries would we have? To engage these questions, I offer a rereading of the *images of colonialism* in order to address the gender gap in literary discourses on imaginative responses to colonialism in modern African poetry. I will engage in a close reading of selected poems of two São Toméan female poets, Alda do Espírito Santo and Maria Manuela Margarido, in order to lay bare the sinews of imagination running through the body of their poetry on African colonial experience within the specific context of São Tomé and Príncipe. This rereading is significant because it addresses the gender gap that is symptomatic of the patriarchal order through which poetic knowledge in the canon of modern African literature is imagined.

In Egudu’s essay, we take a critical journey through the poetry of seven African poets—Christopher Okigbo, Kofi Awoonor, John Pepper Clark, Taban Lo Liyong, David Diop, Okot p’Bitek, and Mabel Segun. As we have seen from the list, six of these African poets are male. In fact, the poem of Segun, who is the only female poet represented, is read last. Why would her work be the last even as the only female poet represented? The “inclusion” of Segun’s poetry in Egudu’s work appears like an afterthought. The appearance of her poetic text is in fact problematic in the sense that Egudu could not really offer a textual analysis of the “image” of colonialism he elaborately deals with in men’s poetry. In what seems like a redundant reduplication from which we learn little or nothing about the poetics and anticolonial imaginary in female poetry, Egudu states—“reading” Segun’s only poem included, “A Second Olympus”—that it

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

“provided an early pointer to the perspective in which colonialism would be viewed in later days by poets.”<sup>4</sup> This is a powerful critical commentary on Segun’s poem which, unfortunately, the essay does not unpack; it offers no reading of this “early pointer” to later perspective on colonialism present in the poem.

Thus, the first critical endeavor will be to revisit that same Segun’s poem to unravel the “early pointer” of anticolonial poetics that Egudu perceptively calls attention to. Rereading the poem, one sees her strong critique of the colonial imaginary that constructs the *strangeness* of the other in the image of damnation; the other can only be brought from the repulsive strangeness (as captured in the image of “earthworms” as “wriggly things” very much detested)<sup>5</sup> to a relatable familiarity through utter destruction. The centrality of the images of “killing” and “trampling” tells this story of colonial violence. The poem shows very dense images of alienation as a result colonial destruction of African spirituality: “They trampled down all that was strange / And filled the void / With half-digested alien thought.”<sup>6</sup> The colonizers are described in the oxymoronic figure of “Benevolent despots” as a critique of their mission to civilize “an unwilling race” *materialized* by “blatant violation” which the poet creatively casts in an image as violent as “Bull-dozers trampling on virgin ground.”<sup>7</sup> The core of the poem is its allusion to the Greek myth of the formation of the Olympian gods as a violent destruction of the Titans, their predecessors, on Mount Olympus.<sup>8</sup> The allusion, cast in the metaphor of “A Second Olympus,” stages the recurrence of the colonial logic of domination through violence that is reproduced on the African space.

From this rereading, it is apparent that Egudu’s “reading” of the female text misses the wealth of these images. The fact of this “missing” or non-recognition of the female poetic imaginary speaks to the gender gap in the construction of poetic knowledge in modern African poetry. Of course, this gender gap is not peculiar to Egudu’s reading. For instance, the ready

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>5</sup> Mabel Segun, “A Second Olympus,” in *Reflections: Nigerian Prose and Verse*, ed. Frances Ademola (Lagos: African University Press, 1962), 67.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Mount Olympus,” Greek Mythology, accessed March 19, 2016, [http://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Places/Mount\\_Olympus/mount\\_olympus.html](http://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Places/Mount_Olympus/mount_olympus.html)

handpick for Frank Mowah when making a commentary on African poets that “versified their colonial, anti-colonial and other romantic visions” are male poets like Dennis Osadebay, Augustine Kunene, David Rubadiri, Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Gabriel Okara, among others.<sup>9</sup> Babatunde Omobowale cultivates the same androcentric sentiment in his reading of Anglophone West African poets who throw their voices on the issue of colonialism during the transitional phase.<sup>10</sup> The impression such kinds of reading offer African poetry as a cultural production propagates the myth of androcentric authority on the poetic imaginary. This myth is a process of power that silences women’s contribution to discourses on Africa and denies their status as producers of knowledge and cultural imagination. For women’s poetic contribution to be critically reaccessed and reassessed, my rereading unpacks the processes of denial through a sustained close reading of women’s perspective on the issue of colonialism in Africa.

My interest in examining women’s creative investment in anticolonial poetics stems from my awareness of the dearth of studies on women’s poetry and the issue of colonialism. In fact, it is “unthinkable”<sup>11</sup> to associate women’s poetry with the imaginaries that the colonial experience produces in Africa. The logic of this “unthinkability” is important, it seems, to sustaining the power of patriarchal authority and control of the poetic as public discourse that responds to the predicament of colonialism. In other words, the assumption is that it is unthinkable for women to have the knowledge to make significant contributions to public discourse because it is outside the boundary of their function in the domestic space. With very little critical attention paid to the contributions of women’s poetic voices to the issue of colonialism in Africa comes an implicit denial of women’s agency of imagination in anticolonial struggle. Indeed, this denial could be read as one logic through which women are excluded from center of power in the (re)imagining of the postcolonial nation-

<sup>9</sup> Frank Mowah, “Modern African Poetry,” in *Studies in Poetry*, ed. Ademola Dasylva and Oluwatoyin Jegede (Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers, 2005), 103.

<sup>10</sup> Babatunde Omobowale, “Anglophone West African Poetry,” *ibid.*, 111–123.

<sup>11</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 82. According to Trouillot, the *unthinkable* “is that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives, that which perverts all answers because it defies the terms under which the questions were phrased.” The idea that other ways of doing and being are inconceivable outside the normative frame of possibility is resonant in the notion of the unthinkable.

state.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that Tanure Ojaide makes a critical attempt at reading women's poetry out of the hegemony of the "*MaleStream*."<sup>13</sup> Ojaide avers that "African women poets have from the beginning of writing in the continent ranged with their male counterparts in struggling against foreign aggression, colonialism, and racism."<sup>14</sup> However, Ojaide's submission is not supported by a deep analysis of the poetic innovations in African women's poetry. If we take another critical look at women's poetic production in Africa in relation to anticolonial poetics, we would have another view of the canon of modern African poetry as counter-imagination to colonial imaginaries. Obviously, readings that miss the vibrancy of women's engagement with colonialism in their poetry strategically exclude women's contributions from the economy of images (re)defining that tragic moment in Africa history.

These *images of colonialism* are already there in the female poetic text. In the ambiguous couplet ending Maria Manuela Margarido's poem, "Landscape" ("And an image of rustic lines / takes over the time and the word."<sup>15</sup>), the centrality of "an image" already calls attention to itself.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> My commentary hinges on the consciousness of the power of imagination and the imagination of power in the remaking of the myth of the nation. The implication of this patriarchal mode of consciousness is that it assumes women cannot imagine political struggle; consequently they cannot hold power. Moreover, it is within this consciousness that the history of anticolonial struggle often celebrates men as the postcolonial nation-maker which erases the roles of women in the struggle.

<sup>13</sup> Tanure Ojaide, *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa: Essays on African Poetry* (Durham: Carolina University Press, 1996), 95.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> Maria Manuela Margarido, "Landscape," in *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry*, ed. Stella Chipasula and Frank Chipasula (Oxford: Heinemann, 1995), 102.

<sup>16</sup> The couplet in its ambiguity also makes historical reference to António de Oliveira Salazar's *Estado Novo* (New State) regime in Portugal. Portugal, Patrick Chabal explains, "was from 1926 a repressive dictatorship with systemic censorship and thus little scope for free expression. Under these conditions, not only was Portugal's cultural life stunted, but creative cultural 'influences' between metropolis and Africa, which were so important in the cases of the British and French empires, were severely limited." See Patrick Chabal, *A Postcolonial Literature of Lusophone Africa* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 19. Many writers ran into problems with the state during this period even in the Portuguese colonies. In fact, both Margarido and Espírito Santo were harassed and persecuted by the International Police for the Defense of the State in the late 50s and early 60s. See Claudia Amorim, "Alda Espírito Santo (Alda Graça)," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 367: African Lusophone Writers*, ed. Monica Rector and Richard Vernon (Detroit: A Bruccoli Clark Layman Book, 2012), 83; Chipasula and Chipasula *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry*, 223.

The “lines” already invite a reading of the overwhelming place of an image that “takes over” the history (as in “the time,” a nominal group modified by a definite article asserting its specificity to a certain kind of time) and the textuality of that history (as in “the word” linked to its “time” by a coordinating conjunction “and,” a paratactic structure linking a specific history to its specific historiography). Although this loaded image of a tragic world of colonial trauma comes to us in the “rustic lines” of the female text, it leaves its radical trace on history and historiography. It is as well important to reflect on the opening of Alda do Espírito Santo’s “The Same Side of the Canoe”:

The words of our day  
are simple words  
clear as brook waters  
spurting from rust-red slopes  
in the clear morning of each day.<sup>17</sup>

The opening lines of the poem present a powerful yet lucid commentary on “the word” and “the time” as we see in Margarido’s take on the “rustic lines.” This same poetics by both female poets is fascinating. Espírito Santo offers us a vision of her project on the anticolonial imaginary by appealing to the clarity of textualizing the immediate history of “our day”; she invokes simplicity in similitude relation to the clarity of “brook waters.” The rhetorical force of the “rust-red” image like the “rustic” of Margarido’s poetry is worth recognition. It makes sense if the female poetic text imagines that the tragic history of colonialism does not necessarily have to be emplotted in a finessed image(s). In this line of engagement of “an image,” there is a framework in the female text that is laden with the critical presupposition that it is a disservice to imagine the tragedy of colonialism in a constellation of images outside the bound of the rustic. It is in the “rustic” (the unfinished, the crude, the rough, the rusted) that we can find images responding to colonialism in a mode that commensurate its tragedy on Africa. As we have already seen the kind of explosive reading the image of colonialism in the couplet of the female text could yield, it behooves us to begin to think of what we are missing in readings of these images in modern African poetry that exorcise women’s imaginative responses.

<sup>17</sup> Alda do Espírito Santo, “The Same Side of the Canoe,” *ibid.*, 104.

Therefore, I ground my argument in the conviction that it is when we take another view of the canon of modern African poetry that we can begin to spot its gender blindness and the ideas (re)producing the gender blindness. My objective in this chapter is not to directly unpack the ideas underlying the gender blindness in the criticism of modern African poetry. Nevertheless, it is my hope that a rethinking of the gender blindness by a textual reading of women's poetry on the theme of colonialism would challenge the underlying idea of its exclusion and the power of that exclusion. It is within this framework of textual reading that I engage ten poems of the two São Toméan female poets, Espírito Santo and Margarido, in English translation. Eight of the poems appear in *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry* (1995), a volume edited by Stella and Frank Chipasula, to challenge the absence of women's poetry in anthologies defining the canon of modern African poetry.<sup>18</sup> Only two of the poems appear in Donald Burness' *Ossobó* (2005): Espírito Santo's "Mama Catxina" and "Colonist Cocoa."<sup>19</sup> I acknowledge that the close reading I adopt for the explication of the text is mediated by translation. Nevertheless, I feel it is important to read women's poetry coming from this context through a textual analytic because, as Niyi Afolabi has claimed, there is a marked "negligence" to cultural productions coming out of São Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>20</sup> The negligence impedes a rich dialogue of Lusophone texts with their African neighboring texts. My decision to concentrate on a specific context stems from a refusal to lump up the experiences of colonialism in Africa. I want to avoid a reading that generalizes the colonial experiences in Africa, as most studies on African poetry and the theme of colonialism do, by paying close attention to the São Toméan context and how this context shapes women's poetic text as a creative response to the violence of colonial experience.

Colonialism, even though it is a common past of the historical experience of the African continent, in the archipelago of São Tomé and Príncipe, it takes a unique dimension. Another country that shares similar colonial dimension with São Tomé and Príncipe is Cape Verde. Patrick Chabal explains that São Tomé and Príncipe, like Cape Verde, "in many crucial

<sup>18</sup> Stella Chipasula and Frank Chipasula, ed. *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1995), 101–111.

<sup>19</sup> Donald Burness, *Ossobó: Essays on the Literature of São Tomé and Príncipe* (Trenton: African World Press, 2005), 126–133.

<sup>20</sup> Niyi Afolabi, "The Taming of the Trickster Bird," preface to *Ossobó* by Burness (Trenton: African World Press, 2005), xiii.

respects are better understood as Creole ... societies – and in this way more similar to the Caribbean.”<sup>21</sup> Unlike the Caribbean and other parts of Africa which had existing cultures and indigenous communities before their “discovery,” São Tomé and Príncipe, discovered in the late fifteenth century, was an “uninhabited archipelago.”<sup>22</sup> Discovered by the Portuguese navigators, João de Santarem and Pedro Escobar, the archipelago quickly became important to settlers. The church, plantations, and slave economy thrived in the archipelago. The colony was populated by volunteers and unwanted elements in Portugal (deported Jewish children and convicts). With the rise of the sugar plantation in the early sixteenth century was the pressing need for African slaves for plantation labor. Slaves were brought from Gabon, Congo, Benin, and Angola. There was mixture among the different races and ethnicities that were manumitted in 1515 and 1517. The racial and ethnic mixture produced free local Creoles known as *Forros*.<sup>23</sup> This mixture produced a Creole culture and society in São Tomé and Príncipe. The Creoles came to the height of power and control in the mid-sixteenth century. There were also the maroon communities formed by runaway slaves known as *Angolares*.

Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century, there were various conflicts within and among the different factions in the archipelago. There were internal conflicts among the Creole elite and there were several slave revolts, which troubled the political stability of the colony. A prominent slave revolt was led by Amador in 1595, who was later defeated. The decline in sugar plantation economy because of the poor quality of sugar produced (as a result of the climatic condition) and the Brazilian competitive sugar market, and the fall in slave market contributed to economic instability. The fact that other colonial powers (the Dutch, the English, and the French) often assaulted the archipelago because of its wealth also heightened instability in the archipelago. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the establishments of coffee and cocoa plantations, which required huge labor. However, with the abolition of slavery, contract workers (another form of forced labor) were recruited from Angola, and from the early twentieth century, they were recruited from Mozambique and Cape Verde.<sup>24</sup> With these new plantation systems,

<sup>21</sup> Chabal, *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 33.

<sup>22</sup> Gerhard Seibert, “São Tomé and Príncipe, to 1800,” in *Encyclopedia of African History*, vol. 3, ed. Kevin Shillington (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2005), 1318.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1319.

<sup>24</sup> Seibert, “São Tomé and Príncipe, 1800 to the Present,” *ibid.*, 1320.

also known as *roças*, came what Tony Hodges and Malyn Newitt called “the scramble for land.”<sup>25</sup> The Creoles were dispossessed of their lands by the Portuguese colonists during the expansion of the plantation economy. Thus, the Creole elites moved from being land owners to being colonial administrative employees in order to maintain their status. A major crisis that kindled nationalist struggle in the mid-twentieth century was the Batepá Massacre of February 1953. São Tomé and Príncipe gained independence on July 12, 1975.<sup>26</sup>

This brief historical survey shows that the archipelago of São Tomé and Príncipe is a site of multiple colonialisms and slavery and, as Burness has argued, it is also a site defined by racial and cultural heterogeneity.<sup>27</sup> The uniqueness of the five centuries of the colonial experience in the archipelago finds creative expressions in Margarido’s and Espírito Santo’s poetry. These female poets use powerful images to shock us to imagine the gravity of the anguish and loss (psychological, spiritual, historical, and material) that colonialism caused in the archipelago. Margarido’s poem, “You Who Occupies our Land,” portrays the image of a “home” under the siege of the colonial oppressive forces. The poem makes us *see* the magnitude of colonial destruction and exploitation of humans and ecology. It opens with a negative imperative: “Do not lose sight / of the skipping children.”<sup>28</sup> These lines call the guardians of the playing children to be aware of the dangers looming in the atmosphere, which limit even the freedom of children to play around in their land. The visual image of the “black khaki garbed snake” (a metaphor of the dangers of the state police force) that “struts before the hut door” following the opening imperative consolidates the consciousness of an oppressive regime where violence is everywhere even at people’s home. The poet persona takes stock of the disaster in the colony thus:

The breadfruit trees they cut down  
to leave us hungry.  
The roads they watch  
for fleeing cacao.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Tony Hodges and Malyn Newitt, *São Tomé and Príncipe: From Plantation Colony to Microstate* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 28.

<sup>26</sup> Seibert, “São Tomé and Príncipe, 1800 to the Present,” 1320–1321.

<sup>27</sup> Burness, *Ossobó*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Margarido, “You Who Occupies our Land,” 101.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

The deixis of person “they” signifies the settler colonists who exploit the resource of the land to the point that the plantation workers go hungry. The persona’s awareness of the deplorable condition of the plantation workers, which s/he belongs to, is expressed thus: “We know ourselves, / sorters of tea from hampers / bark-strippers of the cashew trees.”<sup>30</sup> The parallelism captures the image of perpetual labor that defines the lives of the plantation workers.

References to the cash crops—cacao, tea, and coffee, which we find in a parenthetical line in another poem “Socope,” “(copra, coffee or cocoa – all the same)”<sup>31</sup>—in “You Who Occupies our Land” show the kind of cash economy that began from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries onward as a shift from the sugar plantation, which marks another phase in the colonization of the archipelago. The personification “fleeing cacao” signals the speed at which the abundance of the land goes elsewhere without benefiting those whose labor produces it. Even infrastructures such as roads were put in place to facilitate colonial exploitation. The persona blends visual and olfactory images to capture the “Tragedy we already know”:

the flaming hut  
firing up the palm-thatched roof,  
the smoke smell  
mixing into the smell of  
guando fruit and death.<sup>32</sup>

The blurring of the boundary between life (if we read “guando fruit” as a productive force of life) and death shows the plantation as a space of unrest and violence. In a quatrain crafted in the force of rhetorical question, the poetic voice asks a historical question pertaining to the formation and tension of racial hierarchy in the archipelago. Making a contrast between “we” (the plantation workers, mostly Negroes) and “you” (“the faintly off-colour / masks of men / barely empty ghosts of men”<sup>33</sup> that is suggestive of the local Creoles who deem their status higher than the workers), the persona questions the racial hierarchy which is painted in the image of

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Margarido, “Socope,” 101–102.

<sup>32</sup> See note 28 above.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

superficiality to unveil its abstraction.<sup>34</sup> The careful choice of words that describes the local Creole subjects—"off-colour," "masks," "barely empty ghosts"—questions their claims to superior humanity. Raising the question "you who occupy our land?"<sup>35</sup> exposes the Creoles' superfluous claim to possession of the land from which, ironically, they are all dispossessed by the colonists. The condemnation of colonial dispossession runs through the poem.

In "Socope," which is a reference to the most popular dance in the archipelago,<sup>36</sup> we are confronted with the image of the plantation workers' burdened life and harsh realities. The poem paints the picture of "mist of life /on backs bent over load."<sup>37</sup> The metaphor "mist of life" that marks the shift from the lush of "The long green grasses of my island," signifies the harsh lived experiences of the field workers represented by the synecdoche of "backs." The poem shifts rapidly from the visual image of laborious life to the audio-visual images of the "dance" of lamentation for a controlled life blurred with the protest for liberty:

I hear steps in the calculated  
socope rhythm,  
the feet-roots-from-the-earth  
while the chorus  
insists with a lament  
(lament or protest – all the same)  
dragging itself continuously  
until it explodes  
in a strong longing for liberty.<sup>38</sup>

Here we see the image of continuous fatigue of the synecdoche (in hyphenated construct) of the workers as "the feet-roots-from-the-earth." Striking is the poetics of rupture and the lyrical representation of "strong longing" for radical contestation of the colonial oppressive regime. The

<sup>34</sup> Bruce Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). 9. Hall's conceptualization of race, although in another historical context, as a mode of "abstractions" galvanized to perform particular economic, social, and political functions is useful in thinking about how Margarido constructs the superficiality of race in the poem.

<sup>35</sup> See note 31 above.

<sup>36</sup> Burness, *Ossobó*, 149.

<sup>37</sup> Margarido, "Socope," 101.

<sup>38</sup> Margarido, "Landscape," 102.

oxymoronic negotiation of the chorus of lament and the explosion of protest sustains the structure of the poem.

Central to Margarido's poetry is the tropology of nature and landscape in her poetic discourse on colonialism. In "Landscape," the poet persona takes us into the utopian dream of revolt colored with the hope of freedom. This utopian dream is constructed through a radical refunctioning of landscape and nature. The poem draws on the absurd conjoining of the image of "the sky," ploughed like the landscape by "obstructed stones / oscillating in a tornado's womb." This tornado is garbed "with its mad / plumes."<sup>39</sup> The "High dream" is compared using simile with the height of "the coconut tree along the ocean / with its golden and firm fruits." These are very strong images combining powerful visual, auditory, and kinetic systems in parallel relation to color, height, and the violence of nature discernible by the force of lyrical repetition, which foregrounds a surrealistic imaginary of resistance to the repressive structure of colonialism. As we have seen in the beginning of "Socope," the image of a burdened life is reiterated at the beginning of "Landscape": "Nightfall ... grass on the back / of the gleaming black man / on his way to the yard."<sup>40</sup> The recurrence of the "back" heightens the image of a harsh life of forced labor. In an interesting passage of time in the utopian space of "the sky," "the severe anguish / of revolt passes by / with its claws its anxieties its certainties."<sup>41</sup>

The poem "Roça" gives time an anthropomorphic dimension to display the condition of being and the ritual of labor on the plantation—the title of the poem is a reference to the name of the plantation system. The poem is structured in three stanzas in accordance with the movement from the wounds of the traumatic experience of colonial exploitations to the futuristic dream "of a free life / that your action / will bring about."<sup>42</sup> The poetic voice quips in a mournful and solemn tone:

The night wounded  
by a sharp spear  
of rage  
bleeds in the woods.  
Dawn also bleeds  
in its own way.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Margarido, "Roça," 102.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Through the graphic images, we experience the wound of time/history and the resilience of the wounded spirit—the will to rage, anger, hope, and certainty of revolt and liberty. The symbolic repetition of the lexical verb “bleeds” appeals to our sense of sight to give us a “sharp” perception of the trauma of colonial experience. In what follows in the second stanza, the poem adopts foregrounding parallelistic structure to represent the colonial exploitation of labor. The stanza is connected with the first by the motif of bleeding time:

The morning still bleeds:  
you cut the banana tree  
with a silver axe;  
hoe the bushes  
with an axe of anger;  
open the coconut  
with an axe of hope;  
cut bunches of andim  
with an axe of certainty.<sup>44</sup>

The lines render a tight image of the dialectics of the action of labor and the tool of resistance in the parallelistic repetition of four metaphorical axes. The return to dream at the end of the poem in a gaze toward the utopian freedom of the future functions as a mode of psychological and spiritual escape from the stifling present to imagine a sense of hope and survival. However, the poetic voice complicates this utopia as incomplete without the will to revolutionary action. It is when the utopia functions as a catalyst for action that the “silver axe” (a symbol of revolutionary responsibility on the part of the oppressed) with all its *anger*, *hope*, and *certainty* can hold a promise of liberation.

Turning to Espírito Santo’s poetry, the narrative thrust of her poems in intense entanglement with a lyricism propelled by reiterations and parallelisms fashions an elaborate image of colonialism in São Tomé and Príncipe that lingers long in our mind’s eyes. In the poem, “The Same Side of the Canoe,” the images of disenchantment, suffering, torture, and violence of the colonial imperialistic project in the archipelago of São Tomé and Príncipe run through the narrative of the poem. The poem is structured in nine stanzas that present different shades of the dehumanization of colo-

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

nial experience. In a conversational style, the subject “I” (the addresser) addresses *her* kin (“my brother[s]” and “my sister[s]”) referred to with the deixis of person “you” (the addressee). It is significant to note that the subject here is a speaking subject, the subject shattering the colonial structure of silence. The potent illocutionary act, “So it is I speak to you,”<sup>45</sup> that launches the second stanza of the poem, carries an expressive force, a responsibility to uncover the injustices of the colonial/plantation system. The subject, in fact *speaking* “these words ... [is] *doing* something”<sup>46</sup> with words, to use J. L. Austin’s words—recalling the images of colonial trauma with words and at the same time enunciating a “speech act” channeled to engender the *performative* force<sup>47</sup> of collaborative resistance. The subject proceeds, appealing to kinship ties:

my brother contracted to the coffee plantation  
 my brother leaving your blood on the bridge  
 or sailing the sea, a part of yourself lost battling the shark  
 My sister, laundering, laundering  
 for bread to feed your sons,  
 my sister selling pits of fruit  
 to the nearest shop  
 for the mourning of your dead,  
 my adjusted sister  
 selling yourself for a life of greater ease,  
 in the end only suffering more ...<sup>48</sup>

What stands out in these evocatively troubling lines is the sordid image of suffering and death. In another poem, “Colonist Cocoa,” the same appeal to kinship is motivated in the opening lines: “Our brothers from Angola / From Angola and Mozambique.”<sup>49</sup> In this appeal to kinship is a sense of *trans/historicity* of colonial trauma.<sup>50</sup> The Angolans and Mozambicans

<sup>45</sup> Espírito Santo, “The Same Side of the Canoe,” 104.

<sup>46</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> See note 43 above.

<sup>49</sup> Espírito Santo, “Colonist Cocoa,” 132.

<sup>50</sup> Nancy Van Styvendale, “The Trans/Historicity of Trauma in Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash* and Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer*,” *Studies in the Novel* 40, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 203–223. Van Styvendale’s notion of *trans/historicity* of trauma attends to the cumulativeness, collectivity, intergenerationality, and intersubjectivity of colonial trauma

(and the Cape Verdeans) bear the pains of the violence of contract (forced) labor. The persona takes us into the harsh working and living conditions of cocoa and coffee plantation labor: “For colonist cocoa / Manual labor on S. Tomé / Death in S. Tomé.”<sup>51</sup> Here we see that it is a form of labor unto death as the metaphor in the lines suggests. Repeating the cash crops “cocoa” and “coffee” all through the poem, the crops are metaphorically paralleled with “Inferno of S Tomé.”<sup>52</sup> “Cocoa” especially having the highest repetitive frequency is seen as the cause of the disorder “In the 30s / Massacre ... / Nineteen fifty-three.”<sup>53</sup> The poem constructs an image of colonial crises using the figure of cocoa in the context of historical allusion to the conflicts in the 1930s—the “New State” period of the regime of António de Oliveira Salazar, which serves as the condition for the possibility of the Batepá Massacre in 1953.<sup>54</sup>

Returning to “The Same Side of the Canoe,” the image of *the-same-side-of-the canoe* in the poem obeys the logic of different figurations. First, it is imagined, using Michel Foucault’s word, as a “heterotopia” of suffering.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, the poem chronicles the shared suffering of the colonized on the plantations and the archipelago as heterotopia of suffering in themselves. We *see* the colonized subject “blackened ... by life,” “battered by hurricane tempests,” and in a slow mournful tone, we *hear* them mourn the loss of “their sons” in “endless wakes,” a description of a “deathscape” cast in a euphemistic frame. As Achille Mbembe has rightly stated, “life itself [on the plantation] exists only in bursts and exchange with death.”<sup>56</sup> In this deathscape of the colony, we also *see* and *hear* “the frenetic rhythm” and “wild cries” and “the madness” of the ritual of resistance. Pathetic is auditory image of the colonized subjects’ “agonizing

which challenges the singular and fixed conception (in time and space) of event in trauma theory. Van Styvendale writes, “[t]heorize the trans/historicity of such an event-which-is-not-one [the multiple trajectories of trauma] is to focus on the way in which the prefix “trans” attaches to the historicity of trauma a sense of moving across or through—rather than beyond—history” (see 218).

<sup>51</sup> See note 47 above.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> See Hodges and Newitt, *São Tomé and Príncipe*, 43–45.

<sup>55</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984): 1–9.

<sup>56</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 15.

voice uttering prayers, oath, and maledictions.”<sup>57</sup> The superabundance of metaphors gestures to the currents of strong protest consciousness running through this heterotopia of suffering. In the second to the last stanza, introduced by a connective of contrast “But,” it becomes a utopia of beauty (of course, the beauty of freedom) that will materialize by the desire for collaborative resistance (metaphorized as “a great league”). The collaborative resistance is represented by the parallelistic repetition of the joining of “our millenary hands, / hands of the crane on the docks, / hands of the plantations and beaches” (a profound metaphor of the self, confined to a life of perpetual labor) “for our children’s dreams.”<sup>58</sup> Here again is a gaze toward the future we have encountered in Margarido’s imagining of the utopia of freedom. Espíritu Santo imagines a futurism of “the marvellous beach,” of “the canoe of *our* beaches.”<sup>59</sup> The possessive register of the collective deixis of person embedded in nominal group “of our beaches” within the larger nominal structure suggestive of the archipelagic space is an intense disavowal of the colonial dispossession of the colonized which would materialize through collaborative resistance signified by the sustained reiteration of “together” and “joining.” This is the subject’s “cry of hope.”<sup>60</sup>

In another provocative poem, “Where are the Men Chased Away by that Mad Wind?” (as the title draws attention to its provocativeness), the visual and echoistic image the narrative relays is that of “Drops of blood drip[ing] on the earth.”<sup>61</sup> With what we experience in the remaining of the poem, it is an understatement to describe the magnitude of colonial and slavery violence with the word “drip” and not “flow.” The reiteration of the images of “blood” that reddens the green earth and the sea, “thumps of falling bodies,” “fallen lives, / the screams and the cries of pain / of men who are no longer men,”<sup>62</sup> men in the zone of “the *damné*”<sup>63</sup> disposable “under the fists of nameless executioners,” captures the unspeakable destruction of the colonized subjects that “sinks into the silence” of

<sup>57</sup> Espíritu Santo, “The Same Side of the Canoe,” 105.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 103 (emphasis added).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>61</sup> Espíritu Santo, “Where are the Men Chased Away by that Mad Wind?” 106.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (March/May, 2007): 253.

history.<sup>64</sup> The poet persona questions the silences of the history of colonial violence by turning to the traumatic memories of tragic spaces. The place of torture, Fernão Dias,<sup>65</sup> becomes a space the persona turns to for recuperating historical loss. The sea and the wharf are figured as the metaphor of “the annals.”<sup>66</sup> These spaces become “powerful emotional geographies”<sup>67</sup> from where the persona (re)imagines the violence of colonial history. *The bush* and *the death camps* are other tragic geographies figured in the poem. The poem recounts the repeated violence of the “Zé Mulatto” described in the metaphor of “the executioners.”<sup>68</sup>

With references to tragic spaces, the persona recounts traumatic memory of the Batepá Massacre. There is an actual historical reference to the date “the 5th of February” when the tragedy explodes on a full scale. The images of death and torture spill all over the lines—“death’s oven,” “the mass grave,” “the storms / of incendiary flames / the burnt lives,” and “the bush of death.”<sup>69</sup> The persona cries for justice. The cries are steeped in the historical consciousness of the staggering destruction of humans and environment. The explosive and repetitive demand for justice breaks the ice of historical silence. The persona makes a profound performative utterance that launches the second stanza of the poem: “– Up we stand –.”<sup>70</sup> The poetics of justice and revenge in the poem is engineered toward the imaginary of the hope of freedom as the persona relates in the last stanza:

This is the flame of mankind  
singing its hope  
of a world without chains  
where freedom  
will be the only motherland<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Espírito Santo, “Where are the Men Chased Away by that Mad Wind?” 106–107.

<sup>65</sup> See Burness, *Ossobó*, 38–41. Burness explains the inhumane condition of the jail, Fernão Dias, as a place of terror and torture where thousands of people confronted excruciating pain and death. The Zé Mulato was the head torturer and António Luís Coelho was the grand inquisitor.

<sup>66</sup> See note 62 above.

<sup>67</sup> Shalini Puri, “Finding the Field: Notes on Caribbean Cultural Criticism, Area Studies, and the Forms of Engagement,” *small axe* 41 (2013): 60.

<sup>68</sup> Espírito Santo, “Where are the Men Chased Away by that Mad Wind?” 107.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 107–108.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

I will say, in this “song of hope” which is the crux of her decolonization project, Espírito Santo imagines a world, the only world of possibilities, where there would be normalization of freedom as its refiguring in the spatial metaphor of “motherland” suggests. This is a profound decolonial ideal, an ideal of universal freedom and a gift of hospitality toward oneself and others in the world.

In other poems, the centrality of the female figure relays the specificity women’s experiences during the colonial period in São Tomé and Príncipe. In the poem “Far from the Beach” which presents the stark image of “the wasteland” of the colony using the tropologies of nature and shattered childhood dreams, we see a mother’s life burdened with unimaginable suffering and poverty. The mother is “in the struggle for life”; she bears “a fish basket on her head / for her daily work / with the baby on her *walking back*.”<sup>72</sup> This is a pathetic image of a woman contending with the burden of motherhood and colonial oppression. The absurd image of “walking back” suggests the continuous laboring of the woman’s body in the colonial regime; the adjective, “walking,” marks that sense of continuity and the routine of labor. Indeed, the repetition of “walking” as a continuous verb afterward in the following parallelism amplifies the images of the trauma of female labor in the colonial structure: “Mother walking under the weight of life / mother walking for the fish to sell.”<sup>73</sup> At the end, she is described as “my placid mother.” In that sense of the “placid,” there appears to be an ironic contestation of the myth of feminine docility and the way they (their body and labor) are exploited under the colonial regime.

Robert Garfield and Seibert recorded that women were brought as slaves alongside men for the sole aim of populating the archipelago in the earliest times of the Portuguese discovery and settlement (the archipelago was deemed the white man’s grave as they were often stricken dead by malaria).<sup>74</sup> Black women played the role of production (of labor as human and labor as worker) in what Garfield described as “government-sponsored miscegenation.”<sup>75</sup> Garfield explained that this state instituted miscegenation in the colony “was simply a matter of populating the island as quickly

<sup>72</sup> Espírito Santo, “Far from the Beach,” 109 (emphasis added).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Garfield, *A History of São Tomé Island 1470–1655: The Key to Guinea* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992); Seibert, “São Tomé and Príncipe, to 1800,” 1318–1320.

<sup>75</sup> Garfield, *A History of São Tomé Island*, 17.

as possible, and for those who accepted one of these human gifts, actual marriage was optional. Female “breeding stock” was provided for the male slaves, as well as for the white settlers of the island.”<sup>76</sup> In Garfield’s graphic explanation, what Aimé Césaire calls “the thingification”<sup>77</sup> of the colonized is doubled in the case of the female colonized subject; she is taken as a “human gift” (a thing) and a “breeding stock” (an animal). Thus, women in the colonial system of the plantation are exploited on every side—as domestic slaves and field workers.

In Espírito Santo’s “Grandma Mariana” and “Mama Catxina,” the narrative poems maintain the same structure of address that draws on women’s traumatic memories with a terrific lyrical force (especially through the use of lexical reiteration and parallelism). “Grandma Mariana” opens with the address: “Grandma Mariana, washerwoman / for the whites in the Fazenda.”<sup>78</sup> “Mama Catxina” opens the same way: “Mama Catxina / washerwoman in the houses in the city.”<sup>79</sup> What is foregrounded in these parallel opening addresses to the (grand) mother figures is the image of (colonial) domestic labor as “washerwoman” which defines the status of these female figures. This foregrounding is also aided by the repetition of the continuous verb “washing” in the poems. It recalls the address of the female figure (my sister) in “The Same Side of the Canoe” confined to the domestic labor of laundering.<sup>80</sup> It is through this image of “hard labor”<sup>81</sup> that we experience these women’s consciousness. “Grandma Mariana” presents the image of the woman in her displaced location. The recurrence of her being visualized “smoking her gourd pipe / on the doorstep of the slave-quarters” concretizes her image of colonial displacement.

The questioning voice of her grandson provokes the traumatic memory of slavery that brought the woman like other women to the archipelago: “Why did you cross the seas, old little grandma, / and remain here, all by yourself, / smoking your gourd pipe?”<sup>82</sup> The poem suggests that the woman has been subjected to multiple slavery experiences; she has been to the “distant lands” of the Caribbean on “the journey from sisal fields” that

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>77</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 42.

<sup>78</sup> Espírito Santo, “Grandma Mariana,” 110.

<sup>79</sup> Espírito Santo, “Mama Catxina,” 128.

<sup>80</sup> Espírito Santo, “The Same Side of the Canoe,” 104.

<sup>81</sup> Espírito Santo, “Grandma Mariana,” 110.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 111.

brought her to another slavery experience in the colony of São Tomé.<sup>83</sup> The repetition of her being in “distant lands” is a metaphoric implication of her physical and spiritual estrangement and displacement from her root, her land. The repeated gesture of smoking the gourd pipe reinforced by her location of the act always at the doorstep, complemented with the metaphor of “dark alley”<sup>84</sup> which can be imagined as a liminal space, is a signification of her sense of estrangement. Always located in that liminal space where she is neither here nor there, her sense of dispossession and alienation is given poetic expression. Grandma Mariana’s only response to her curious grandson who has also inherited this malediction of colonial dispossession is:

– ‘Where’s the people’s land?  
Old woman comes, never returns ...  
I came from afar,  
years and years spent in this yard ...  
Mad old woman does not have land anymore  
I will stay here, silly boy<sup>85</sup>

Her only moment of speech in the entire poem—she has confined herself to “a wall of silence”<sup>86</sup>—invokes her sense of dispossession and displacement. The constant ellipsis in her speech is a symptom of the gaps of the unspeakable terror of multiple colonialisms and slaveries in multiple spaces. The words also tell of her sense of strandedness. Here is the life of a woman tired by a long experience of colonial terror in “vast lands of endless plantations”<sup>87</sup> stranded in time and space. She is forced to resign to silence.

However, “Mama Catxina” imagines a counter-figure to the worn-out Grandma Mariana. In the performative address to Mama Catxina, the poetic voice urges her to break out of the limits of the burden of womanhood and colonial labor and to contribute “The force of your mind/ To expel the enemy from your land.”<sup>88</sup> If Grandma Mariana is stranded in her dispossession, the poetic voice in the collective performative (“Let us ...”)

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Espírito Santo, “Mama Catxina,” 128.

enunciated repetitively here calls on Mama Catxina and other women (Grandma Ana, Mana Maria, and Miss Chica) to take possession of their self and land. This is a nationalist voice calling for the weight of the collaborative efforts of women on the nationalist struggle. The voice states: "Dear Mama, our struggle is beautiful, / ... / Let us achieve / Complete Independence."<sup>89</sup> The beauty in the struggle is the beauty of freedom and the disavowal of colonial dispossession. The shift from the image of "placid" womanhood at the beginning to that of women with agency is implicated in this desire for Independence (proper) in its completeness. The poem ends with the imagining of the "most marvelous song in the world"—the song of freedom—that Mama Catxina's son will sing in the future: "Mama Catxina joined / the revolution / Long live September 19."<sup>90</sup> From the specific reference to Mama Catxina, the poem moves to general reference to women: "Long live the women's protest march / Challenging the colonial bugbear. // September 1974."<sup>91</sup> The image of women fashioned in the song is that of women as historical actors. If Mama Catxina's son is a symbolic representation of the sons of the land, then the poetic voice is acknowledging women's struggle in the protest for independence. The poem is a rewriting of the history of the nationalist struggle in São Tomé and Príncipe from women's perspective. The marking of actual historical dates in the lines and the location of women in this temporality is a significant recognition of women's active roles in the nationalist struggle which history often silences.

From the reading of Margarido's and Espírito Santo's poems, the richness of women's poetry in the service of anticolonial imaginary confronts us with such an assertive force. Recurrent in Margarido's poetry are the images of perpetual suffering of the plantation workers and the recurrence of rage, certainty, and hope of liberty. Espírito Santo also appeals to the weight of suffering and historical trauma without giving up on resilience and revolt. However, both poets depart in their style of engaging with the images of colonialism even though they both invest in the intensity of lyricism. Margarido's poetry is lyrically condensed and short; this makes the images in her poems very dense. Again, in the poems examined, Margarido addresses the issue of colonialism without the centrality of the female subject. Her poems address the colonial subject in most cases as a male subject

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 128–129.

and sometimes in the collective sense without appeal to any gender. Meanwhile, Espírito Santo's poems combine the expansiveness of narrativity and the sustained emotion of lyricism. In fact, she sets out to tell the painful story, to recall the traumatic memory of the cost of colonialism on the colonized subjects. There is a strong sense of historical consciousness in her poetry. Moreover, she addresses the question of colonialism through the experiences of the female subject. In her poems, we encounter different female figures damaged by the traumatic colonial experience yet resilient to champion resistance. She paid sustained attention to the contributions of women to the anticolonial struggles. Certainly, Margarido and Espírito Santo, as female subjects re/writing "the time" of colonialism in Africa and investing in "the word," have offered us strong perceptions on the role of poetic imagination in the anticolonial imaginaries that makes it inevitable to expand the conversation on modern African poetry and the issue of colonialism beyond the scribal authority of male writing—the conversation that will take caution not to sacrifice the life of the (female) text on the flooded altar of context.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# Migration and Exile: The Exotic Essence of Life in Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*

*Joshua Agbo*

## INTRODUCTION

Exile for Makhaya becomes a comfort zone defined by wherever he finds himself without any looking back at his homeland. Even though he is the missing piece of himself, exile and migration are essential for him, especially as South Africa becomes a place of harsh living conditions. In this chapter, I intend to pursue the narrative of his movement from home to exile in the novel. My attempt focuses on the linear progression of the plot development, and the causation of events, which are, however, linked to the themes of migration and exile. Makhaya Maseko, one of the main characters, is in search of both freedom and a home elsewhere. He severs ties with his native South Africa to seek refuge in Botswana. He completely surrenders the power of association with his native people, and constantly maintains a forward-looking gaze into the promises of the future.

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Nevertheless, I will try to connect the above portrait painting to the opening vision of Makhaya, and how it explains his unique type of exile. What we have is a painting that creates the imaginative possibility of completely separating the past from the future. Rather than being a realistic representation, Makhaya's figure is better imagined as a symbolic metaphor. It depicts his understanding of exile as a forward-looking phenomenon and also as a move away from the single definable meaning of identity and home. To him, remembering the old home he leaves behind is to lose it, just like Edmond Jabès says that to attempt to tell his story of exile is paradoxically and painfully to lose his story. Jabès puts it this way: "If I tell you about my life in detail ... it escapes in the details I have chosen to recount."<sup>1</sup> This indicates that the most likely way towards depicting the human experience lies not only in the telling but also in the looking or silencing, as well as leaving the space necessary for questions and interpretations. So Makhaya, as a "fence-jumper," or rather as a run-away refugee, leaves South Africa without the intention of returning. He knows his future is always before him, but it is an uncertain kind of future, where hope is the only sustenance he has. To reinforce this, in *Hope Dies Last: Making a Difference in an Indifferent World*, Studs Terkel contends that, "HOPE HAS NEVER TRICKLED DOWN. It has always sprung up,"<sup>2</sup> and he goes further to say,

That's what Jessie de la Cruz meant when she said, "I feel there's gonna be a change, but we're the ones gonna do it, not the government. With us, there's a saying, *La esperanza muere última*. Hope dies last. You can't lose hope. If you lose hope, you lose everything."<sup>3</sup>

Makhaya is a product of this philosophy, as he is clearly optimistic about the future, even though he is unsure about what it holds for him. That is, he is acutely aware that it may either be positive or negative, but he cannot adequately describe or understand it. The more he knows about what shapes his past, the more control he has over his perception of the present, and the better he is to envisage the future he wants to design for himself without stumbling on the way; although it does not guarantee the particular

<sup>1</sup> Paul Auster, "An Interview with Edmond Jabès," *The Sin of the Book: Edmond Jabès* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Studs Terkel, *Hope Dies Last: Making a Difference in an Indifferent World* (London: Granta Books, 2003), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Terkel, *Hope Dies Last*: xi.

future he wants. He is really not sure where he is going, but he only wants to be out of the apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, Makhaya's vision demonstrates how Head uses "rain clouds" as a symbol of hope in the story. The entire novel is a novel of hope, in which, the "rain clouds," as a symbolic metaphor, represent the transition from the harsh life of apartheid rule, and of tribalism to the modern-day development through agricultural co-operatives in the village of Golema Mmidi. "Rain clouds" make a transition from the negative to the positive, and the novel tells us that: "all good things and all good people rain."<sup>4</sup> Obviously, the "rain clouds," for Makhaya, portend a reward of faith, hope, recovery, as well as a new growth. All the refugees, including Makhaya, have dreams of better future in Golema Mmidi.

But, contrary to Makhaya's hope for the future is the provocative statement by John Maxwell Coetzee, saying that, "In fact the future in general does not much interest me. The future is, after all, only a structure of hopes and expectations. It resides in the mind, it has no reality."<sup>5</sup> He argues: "Of course you might reply that the past is likewise a fiction. The past is history, and what is history but a story we tell ourselves, mental construct? But there is something miraculous about the past that the future lacks."<sup>6</sup> While history gives us a shared past, he sees the hope for the future as a "sketchy, barren, bloodless affair."<sup>7</sup> How the individual sees both the past and the future depends on one's outlook towards life shaped by his or her experience.

However, Makhaya's movement is prompted by the perceived black tribalism that pushes him away from home. Thus, seeing Makhaya as an exile, in *The Anatomy of Exile*, Paul Tabori views an exile as

a person compelled to leave or remain outside his country of origin on account of well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion; a person who considers his exile temporary (even though it may last a lifetime) hoping to return to his fatherland when circumstances permit – but unable to do so long as the factors that made him an exile persist.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Bessie Emery Amelia Head, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Coetzee John Maxwell, *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, (New York: Viking Press, 2003), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Maxwell, *Elizabeth Costello*: 38.

<sup>7</sup> Maxwell, *Elizabeth Costello*: 38.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tabori, *The Anatomy of Exile* (London: Harrap, 1972), 30.

One of the reasons advanced by Tabori is true of Makhaya as he leaves his native home because of tribalism. He is angry with his tribal heritage. Percy Mosieleng defines exile as “the condition of life essentially lived outside habitual order and intimate familiarity with the environment.”<sup>9</sup> Mosieleng grounds his argument on Bessie Head’s exilic experience as a carry-over into the exile of her characters. Mosieleng finds it desirable to consider the connection between the biographical and the fictional narratives that invent the detached *other* in the discourse of estrangement. Edward Said, in his essay, “The Mind of Winter-Reflection of Life in Exile,” perceives exilic life as “nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal, and he argues that even if one does get accustomed to this life, its unsettling forces erupt anew.”<sup>10</sup> But, the kind of exile that engages Head’s characters in the displaced space is described as an exile within exile, unique of its type. It is unique in some ways because it is a paradox that places the past and the present side by side. And in this case, for Makhaya, nothing is certain because the past and the present are separate from each other. Makhaya’s exilic consciousness involves cutting of deals, making difficult compromises as he looks for a safe ground that is free from tribal prejudices. His intention is to invent and reinvent himself into multiple identities as much as he can. This is a massive issue for the reader as one is confronted with the pseudo-Makhaya’s identity at the beginning of the novel. This interpretation clearly leads to what Desiree Lewis terms “standpoint epistemology.”<sup>11</sup> She broadly defines standpoint epistemology to mean “the self-consciously partisan interest in particular theories or philosophies.”<sup>12</sup>

But in recent usage, Nancy Hartstock has applied it to a feminist theory that stresses the form of “seeing from below which has universally liberating implications”;<sup>13</sup> although the notion of standpoint seems to have originated first of all from feminist theories, it foregrounds multiple

<sup>9</sup> Percy Mosieleng, “The Condition of Exile and the Negation of Commitment: A Biographical Study of Bessie Head’s Novels,” *Emerging Perspectives on Bessie Head*, ed. Ibrahim Huma, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), 51.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Said, “The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile,” *Harper’s September* (N.P., 1984), 54.

<sup>11</sup> Desiree Lewis, “Power, Representation and the Textual Politics of Bessie Head,” *Emerging Perspectives on Bessie Head*, ed. Ibrahim Huma, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), 123.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, “Power, Representation and the Textual Politics...” 123.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, “Power, Representation and the Textual Politics...” 123.

subjectivities as it relates to the formulation of identity discourse. Theorists like Donna Haraway and Patricia Hill Collins deal with the liberating values of “seeing from below in terms of compound power relations ‘that mould multiple marginalities.’ Recognizing these multiple marginalities leads beyond essentialist, fixed constructions of identity and cultural boundaries.”<sup>14</sup> This is exactly what Makhaya makes of himself, especially as he keeps traversing boundaries to locate a better place for himself. Lewis also contends that this is what Nira Yuval-Davis describes as “transversal politics, and shows that marginal subjectivities are always the provisional effects of the particular discursive boundaries and shifting power relationships.”<sup>15</sup> Lewis, therefore, sums it up by saying, “For Head, naming and exploring freedoms constantly leads to Yuval-Davis’ formulation of ‘transversal politics’: interrogating the way different margins are constructed by transforming hegemonic centers.”<sup>16</sup>

Makhaya is anxious to capture this state of freedom by moving away from the hegemonic centre which apartheid South Africa represents, while Botswana represents the different marginal spaces of freedom. Marginal existence seems to be what Head has to offer her exiled characters. But in recognition of the importance of space, be it public or private, Edward Hall observes that “our spatial environment is especially important because all human experience occurs in a spatial setting whose design has a deep and persisting influence on people in that setting.”<sup>17</sup> In absolute agreement, Howard Stein writes, “Whether as individuals or as groups, human beings tend to cast the identity of their ‘who-ness’ with their emotional ‘where-ness,’ thus merging ‘who I am’ with ‘where I am’ binding self and place.”<sup>18</sup> This realisation is crucially relevant because a particular space may embody “feelings of safety versus threat, the sense of being at home versus isolation and alienation, the sense of continuity and cohesiveness versus discontinuity and fragmentation, and feelings of ‘goodness’ versus ‘badness.’”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 123.

<sup>15</sup> Yuval-Davis Nira, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (London: Sage, 2011), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*: 123.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor, 1966), xi.

<sup>18</sup> Howard F. Stein, *Developmental Time, Cultural Space: Studies in Psychogeography* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1987), xii.

<sup>19</sup> Stein, *Developmental Time, Cultural Space*: 4.

These feelings continue to well up in both the conscious and the sub-conscious of Makhaya, manifesting their various aspects in his life as he journeys on. The novel evidences the fact that “Makhaya found his own kind of transformation in this enchanting world. It wasn’t a new freedom that he silently worked towards but a putting together of the scattered fragments of his life into a coherent and disciplined whole.”<sup>20</sup> He finds it pretty easy to move into this new form of life as, “For one thing he wanted it, and for another he had started on this road, two years previously in a South African prison,”<sup>21</sup> and ultimately, “the end aim in mind being a disciplined life. But the Botswana prison was so beautiful that Makhaya was inclined to make a religion out of everything he found in Golema Mmidi.”<sup>22</sup>

What Head seeks to show through the exile of her characters is the desire for a better quality of life elsewhere. Her characters, depicted as exiles, have the ability to look back and forth easily because they are a product of a socio-political context of apartheid. For instance, in *A Question of Power*, the reader sees Elizabeth as a character who looks forwards and backwards to have a view of both the future and the past—a view that represents the colonial past and the post-colonial present. But Makhaya and Margaret (in *Maru*) have a permanent gaze into the future without any reminiscence of the past. For Head, the condition of exile is about the quest for a utopian, all-inclusive space of belonging, as well as the development of wider human relations. This theme of black exile is a recurring *motif* that runs through Head’s fiction as exemplified in characters like Makhaya Maseko, Elizabeth, and Margaret. Furthermore, it is an engagement with the trauma and the ordeals of border-crossing as I try to explain in this case.

### THE ORDEALS OF CROSSING: FROM HOME TO EXILE

*When Rain Clouds Gather*, on the surface, has a clear-cut linear plot in which one event leads to the other. This is quite the opposite of the narrative style in *Maru*. However, the plot of the novel is a complex one. The story line begins from the period the leading character Makhaya Maseko seeks freedom away from the clutches of the apartheid regime in South

<sup>20</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 127.

<sup>21</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 127.

<sup>22</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 127.

Africa. He hides in a small hut on the South African border, waiting for a chance to escape to the neighbouring state of Botswana. Maxine Sample refers to this as a “gestation period,”<sup>23</sup> saying:

[As] Makhaya waits for the signal that “it is time” for his safe emergence from the hut, the reader learns that Makhaya has additionally rejected the position/place assigned him in the patriarchal community from which he is fleeing. He rejects the part of Africa that he considers “mentally and spiritually dead through the constant perpetuation of false beliefs [of male superiority over women]”.<sup>24</sup>

The big issue Makhaya has, in my view, is really not with patriarchy but with tribalism and apartheid, even as he has always desired to have a feel of what it is like to live in a free society and this desire marks the beginning of the exilic life he imposes on himself. Sample’s claim is rather a slight deviation from the very factors that drive him away from home into exile. Nevertheless, Victor Turner calls this waiting to cross over the border a “liminal state,”<sup>25</sup> although he borrows the term from the Belgian folklorist Arnold Van Gennep, who used it to discuss the sociocultural rites of passage. (Sample similarly calls it a “threshold experience.”<sup>26</sup>) Focusing on the positive aspects of liminality, Turner makes an analogy between the liminal processes and a gestation period. He argues that “by the principle of the economy (or parsimony) of symbolic reference, logically antithetical processes of death and growth may be represented by the same tokens, by huts and tunnels that are at once tombs and wombs.”<sup>27</sup> The symbols of both death and growth appear during Makhaya’s “gestation” period before he crosses over the border and later in the hut where he discovers the remains of Paulina’s son and cremates them. This symbolic liminality has effects on his transformation, which make Makhaya’s identity complex to unravel, and the fact that his background is shrouded in mystery triggers

<sup>23</sup> Maxine Sample, “Space: An Experiential Perspective: Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*,” *Critical Essays on Bessie Head*, Sample Maxine, ed., (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 35.

<sup>24</sup> Sample, “Space: An Experiential Perspective,” 35.

<sup>25</sup> Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage,” *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, Louise Carus Mahdi, Stephen Foster, and Meredith Little, eds., (LaSalle Open Court, 1987), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Sample, “Space: An Experiential Perspective,” 35.

<sup>27</sup> Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage,” 9.

suspense in the reader. For example, when the old man who shelters him in the hut asks him about his name in order to establish his origin, Makhaya reacts in a mischievous manner “‘I’m a Zulu’. And he laughed sarcastically at the thought of calling himself a Zulu.”<sup>28</sup>

The name “Makhaya” sounds unfamiliar to the old man but sounds like a Tswana name. And because the old man does not know what it is, Makhaya asserts a Zulu identity to deceive the old man. The old man is not convinced by Makhaya’s claim because he speaks the Tswana language perfectly. He probes further: “But you speak Tswana fluently.”<sup>29</sup> This means Makhaya may probably have come from the Tswana-speaking tribe that dominates the northern Transvaal. But, Makhaya, speaking with tongue in cheek, cleverly defends himself by saying:

Yes, we Zulus are like that. Since the days of Shaka we’ve assumed that the whole world belongs to us; that’s why we trouble to learn any man’s language. But look here, old man, I’m no tribalist. My parents are – that’s why they saddled me with this foolish name. Why not call me Samuel or Johnson, because I’m no tribalist.<sup>30</sup>

He may have told yet another lie to the old man by imposing the Zulu identity on himself. However, Makhaya’s wish to have an English name, as well as his desire to learn any man’s language causes the reader to share the old man’s scepticism about his Zulu identity. To prove himself as no tribalist, he wishes his parents could have given him a foreign name rather than a tribal one. But this, however, indicates that Makhaya may not really be a Zulu. Thus, his identity, when the reader meets him, becomes a source of mystery. It is a mystery in the sense that Makhaya has a quest to change his identity and name. The complexity of his identity recalls the initiatory comment by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Confessions*, where he says that nature “broke the mould in which she cast me.”<sup>31</sup> However, also relevant is Michel de Montaigne’s apparently contradictory statement: “Each man bears the entire form of the human condition (Chaque homme porte la forme entière de l’humaine condition); every individual bears the stamp or impress of the common lot, like coins struck from the same

<sup>28</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Les Confessions, in Confession,” *Autres Textes Autobiographiques: Oeuvres Complètes*, (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2000), 95.

die.”<sup>32</sup> Because Makhaya sees his identity as belonging to the “common lot” of human nature, he may want to be called either “Samuel” or “Johnson,” as something exotic, but certainly not “Makhaya” because the name “Makhaya” makes him a tribalist. That is what he makes of his native name. He, therefore, wishes to strip himself of his native name, or to undefine his initial self so as to buy a new sense of self in order not to live in the box of one identity. The seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke points out that the concept of “the self depends on memory, that faculty that assures us that we are the same person as before.” And to him, “this self is narrative; it must be retrieved from the past, the lines of continuity leading from past to present traced and retraced.”<sup>33</sup>

Memory is what one chooses to remember and what he or she chooses to forget; and this becomes part of the larger narrative of who he or she believes to be. Because if one has no memory, then he or she has no self. Memory is malleable, as one can either retain, delete, shape, deny, or even stretch it in a quest for who he or she is. Therefore, for Locke, memory is the foundation of identity. Memory is also linked to the distinctive physical characteristics of an individual, as such, “His [Makhaya’s] long thin falling-away cheekbones marked him as a member of either the Xhosa or Zulu tribe.”<sup>34</sup> The use of the adjectives “either” and “or” shows that his identity is not clearly defined, and hence still a mystery for the reader to unravel. The mystery reminds me of the authorial voice in *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo. For her characters to be able to do some kind of physio-therapy, the narrator claims that: “In order to do this right, we need new names. I am Dr. Bullet, she is beautiful, and you are Dr. Roz, he is tall, Sbho says, nodding at me.”<sup>35</sup> They are all wearing a fake mask of professional identity. But Makhaya, unlike Margaret in *Maru*, embraces a common identity and refuses to insist on a particular identity of his own. Lewis adds: “Like Head, Makhaya seems determined to discover a subjectivity unburdened by coercive social obligations and imposed identities. At the start of the novel, we learn of this eagerness to disengage himself from South African norms of political behaviour”<sup>36</sup> where, as Head puts it in *A Bewitched Crossroad*,

<sup>32</sup> Michael de Montaigne, “Du Repentir,” *Essais*, (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), 13.

<sup>33</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding of Identity and Discovery* (London: Penguin, 2004), 14.

<sup>34</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), 82.

<sup>36</sup> Head, *A Bewitched Crossroad* (Johannesburg: Donker, 1984), 130.

On the one hand you felt yourself the persecuted man and on the other, you easily fell prey to all the hate-making political ideologies, which seemed to be the order of the day...[and] which gave rise to a whole new set of retrogressive ideas and retrogressive pride.<sup>37</sup>

Makhaya then flees from his original homeland as someone who has been put in an oppressive subject position, with inherited cultural codes. This narrative simply constructs a range of metaphors and themes, which Lewis connects to the narrative in *The Deep River: A Story of Ancient Tribal Migration*, by Head herself. Lewis goes on to say that in the story, which, Head describes as “an entirely romanticized and fictionalized version of the history of the Botalaote tribe,”<sup>38</sup> and:

[The] love between Sebembele, a chief’s son, and Rankwana the junior wife of the chief, motivates the migration of a community under the leadership of Sebembele. It is implied that by migration they found a new settlement which accommodates their desire for freedom. Rankwana and Sebembele consequently become the pioneering figures in creating new homes based not on a constricting communal obligation, but on realizing individual desires.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, Lewis says, “In a stirring description, the specific meanings of home are deferred as the story’s conclusion concentrates on the quest and Sebembele’s defiance,”<sup>40</sup> which are recorded thus:

The next morning the people of the whole town saw an amazing sight which stirred their hearts. They saw their ruler walk slowly and unaccompanied through town. They saw Sebembele and Rankwana’s father walk to the home of her new husband where she had been secreted. They saw Rankwana and Sebembele walk together through the town.<sup>41</sup>

Obviously, in both *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *The Deep River: A Story of Ancient Tribal Migration*, Head locates the freedoms, as well as the desires of her characters in the construction of strange places which they refer to as homes. The message waiting to be explored in this context

<sup>37</sup> Lewis, “Power, Representation and the Textual Politics...” 123.

<sup>38</sup> Head, *The Deep River: A Story of Ancient Tribal Migration*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Head, *The Deep River*: 6.

<sup>40</sup> Head, *The Deep River*: 6.

<sup>41</sup> Head, *The Deep River*: 5.

is that, human beings are fortunate in their diversity and complexity. As a matter of perspective, Makhaya is not constrained by what he sees, but how he sees it is what matters to him. He may believe that it is possible to have a rich experience of human nature only when he becomes something other than one self. And, if this is indeed the case, then, to my mind, it is his finest attribute as an exilic character. He refuses to reduce the image of who he is to the tiny "box" called identity because he may have seen monocultural identity constructs—be they tribal, nationalist or colonialist—as too troubling, too limiting, too constraining, and too confining for him.

Again, identity being potentially an exclusivist/extremist ideology, he rejects the notion of a single identity which tries to reduce him to one thing and to be that one thing alone. He constructs an alternative story of belongings, and "belongings," used in the plural sense here, are a ground-up justification for him to be more than one thing, to be fluid, and to also humanise his existence in a vast and changing world like his. To establish this within a given context, the reader gets that psychological splitting into a multiple-consciousness of personality like Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*. This persuades the reader into new ways of thinking, and new ways of seeing an exile like Makhaya as a kind of travelling school, who offers his life as an interesting book to be read by other human beings. The novel shows the ordeals of Makhaya in crossing from the South African border to Botswana, as a painful experience. Makhaya tries to run away from home because he has a list of grievances against tribalism, as well as something else. He brings the tribal issues up more glaringly in his conversation with the old man called Dinorego. His problem first begins with his own name. "Makhaya," he says: "That tribal name is the wrong one for me. It is for one who stays home, yet they gave it to me and I have not known a day's peace and contentment in my life."<sup>42</sup> He, therefore, accuses his parents of being tribalistic. But the old man sharply reminds him, saying that it is the education that has turned his mind away.

The old man says: "It's because of education."<sup>43</sup> Dinorego does not see his native name as the problem but rather his western education. He asks, "Why did he jump so at the thought of one tiny scrap? And what about tribalism? What about the white man who was the only recognized enemy of everyone? Oh, so you have no complaints about the white man?"<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 3.

He asks as he tries to pry some information from Makhaya. That Makhaya has fewer issues with the white man than with tribalism further justifies the overall argument of the entire thesis which is black-on-black tribal prejudice.

However, my definite argument does not entirely ignore the ugliness of apartheid (i.e., the white-on-black suppression), as well as its negative impacts on Makhaya. Makhaya, being the centre of our attention, is a victim of a rigid, brutal, blood-letting (life-threatening), dehumanising, and a racial segregationist system called apartheid regime in South Africa—in which, all black people had poor education, and lack of political rights to vote. As a colonial minority in South Africa, with a colonial mentality, Makhaya channels his grievances towards the black-on-black prejudice more than the white-on-black brutality that drives him away from his native South Africa into exile in Botswana. Obviously, it is the colonial education that orients his outlook on life such that he sees more evil in his people than the real, organised enemy, who is the white man. In the theoretical sense of it, I refer to this dilemma as *exilic compromise*, a term which foregrounds a situation in which a character runs away from a particular problem at home, hates people because of it, but accepts a similar version of the same problem elsewhere. It is a double life of double desires, framed in the psycho-existential division of the human mind—the division of self/other and of us/them. Dinorego, the old man, tries to open his eyes to the evils of colonial apartheid, but his blind self never allows him to see how the system has dealt with his sense of reasoning.

Furthermore, Makhaya is painfully honest about his grievances against tribal prejudice. Again, the old man, while nodding his head has this to add: “They should not have given you the education. Take away the little bit of education and you will be only too happy to say, “Mama, please find me a tribal girl and let us plough. It’s only the education that turns a man away from his tribe.”<sup>45</sup> Because Makhaya is trapped in the turbidity of brandy that clouds his brain, the conversation later takes a rambling deviation from the main point. However, the old man in his wisdom brings him back to the point at hand. In trying to elicit some information from him, he asks: “Why was the young man here? What was he fleeing from? A jail sentence, perhaps. And what was this about tribalism?”<sup>46</sup> These questions are targeted at the root causes of Makhaya’s flight from home.

<sup>45</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 4.

When the old man realises that he is running away from tribalism, he quickly reminds him that ahead of him is the worst tribal country on earth. This is clearly a double burden on Makhaya's shoulders. That is, "You are running away from tribalism. But just ahead of you is the worst tribal country in the world. We Barolongs are neighbours of the Botswana, but we cannot get along with them. They are a thick-headed lot who think no further than this door. Tribalism is meat and drink to them."<sup>47</sup> They basically do not get along because the Barolongs hold a superior view of themselves, while they look down on the Botswanans. Makhaya who is in search of a free society reacts thus: "Oh, Papa," he goes on: "I just want to step on free ground. I don't care about people. I don't care about anything .... I want to feel what it is like to live in a free country and then maybe some of the evils in my life will correct themselves."<sup>48</sup> The quest for a free ground is born of the desire for a higher-quality life in Botswana or elsewhere. Head does not immediately and explicitly contrast this desire with the fact that there is no free ground or society anywhere in the world but she rather implicitly depicts it as a utopian illusion. As the novel develops, it becomes clearer that every society has its own problems, and there is no free ground anywhere. Makhaya soon realises this fact himself when he is faced with the disturbing wail of sirens of the patrol van at the border to double-check migrants like him. He is abandoned by the old man as he closes his door.

The abandonment is a rejection of Makhaya not only as an illegal migrant but a rejection of his African brotherhood, which offers a moving insight into the human experience in post-colonial Africa. Here, the very traditions that define the African oneness are partly dead. The old man, being a tribalist, is not free himself and clearly imprisons his soul in the web of hatred. However, the thought of the approaching sirens and being left to his fate troubles Makhaya. He consoles himself by sipping a little brandy. He makes efforts to cross over to "no-man's land." The novel describes the border crossing in vivid detail:

Makhaya made ready to cross that patch of no-man's land. The two border fences were seven-foot-high barriers of close, tautly drawn barbed wire. He waited in the hut until he heard the patrol van pass. Then he removed his heavy overcoat and stuffed it into a large leather bag. He stepped out of the hut and pitched the leather bag over the fence, grasped hold of the barbed

<sup>47</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 4.

wire, and heaved himself up and over. Picking up his bag, he ran as fast as he could across the path of ground to the other fence, where he repeated the performance. Then he was in Botswana.<sup>49</sup>

This is one part of his ordeals in crossing the border. He risks his life in a desperate bid to step on a free ground, as he calls it. This, again, creates a suspense in the reader who wants to find out if Botswana is really a free ground in the sense he uses it. In “his anxiety to get as far away from the border as fast as possible, he hardly felt the intense, penetrating cold of the frosty night”<sup>50</sup> because what dominates his thought is the frightening wail of sirens thereby creating a kind of pensive reflection in him as, “For almost half an hour he sped, blind and deaf and numbed to anything but his major fear.”<sup>51</sup> That is, he reflects only on his fear which is the wailing sirens of the patrol vans. The siren brings him to a sudden halt because he fears that his movement may draw attention to himself:

But the lights of the patrol van swept past and he knew, from timing the patrols throughout the long torturous day, that he had another half hour of safety ahead of him. As he relaxed a little, his mind grasped the fact that he had been sucking in huge gulps of frozen air and that his lungs were flaming with pain. He removed the heavy coat from the bag and put it on. He also took a few careful sips from the brandy bottle and then continued on his way at a more leisurely pace.<sup>52</sup>

Apart from the physical pains, the painful politics of belonging is also involved, as it mainly concerns the identity question and who belongs. Makhaya is thought to be a spy by the old hag he meets who thinks that one has to be a spy to wander about at night. She rants angrily: “Why else do people wander about at night, unless they are spies? All the spies in the world are coming into our country. I tell you, you are a spy! You are a spy.”<sup>53</sup> This gives the reader a layer of understanding about the identity question involved in border-crossing and the calibre of people that trudge into the country. For this simple reason, and for Makhaya to free himself from suspicion of every imaginable kind, to lift himself above himself, and to cross all the hurdles into a safe space in exile, he has to lie several times,

<sup>49</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 4–5.

<sup>50</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 6.

he has to change his name, he has to denounce his tribe, and he has to change his identity, as the cross-border experience changes from context to context, or from situation to situation. By this complex web of migration experiences/ordeals, one can safely think that Makhaya is by interpretation born more than once because of his subjective identity and name. It is more or less a game of survival strategy in a strange land of exile. Based on Makhaya's desperate desire to seek freedom elsewhere, to run away from tribalism, Makhaya can either be a Zulu, Xhosa, or something else, depending on the prevailing circumstances in which he finds himself.

Deborah B. Fontenot correctly sums it up, "The exile, transplanted, has to contend with the xenophobia of his adopted society, and concomitantly, with his powerlessness in that society. The exile... is beset with prominent difficulties of restlessness, powerlessness, and blurred identity,"<sup>54</sup> such as Makhaya's. His reasons for leaving his home country are obviously sharpened again, as he cannot "marry and have children in a country where black men were called 'boy' and 'kaffir.'"<sup>55</sup> These are the most important reasons that drive him away from home, especially as he decides not to be trapped inside the narrow boundary of his tribe. The entire continent for him is "vast without end and he simply felt like moving out of a part of it that was mentally and spiritually dead through the constant perpetuation of false beliefs."<sup>56</sup> Changing his class or name or tribe is like emigrating from one side of his world to the other, and this requires changing his passport, changing his language, as well as losing touch with his people in the old world. But holding onto his conviction, he says, "I might like here [Botswana], was his last thought before falling into a deep, exhausted sleep."<sup>57</sup> This marks a place he has come to root himself in, and as Edward Relph puts it,

To have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one's own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Deborah B. Fontenot, *A Vision of Anarchy: Correlate Structures of Exile and Madness in Selected Works of Doris Lessing and her South African Contemporaries* (Ph.D. diss, University of Illinois, 1988), 16.

<sup>55</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 11.

<sup>56</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Edward Relph, "Geographical Experiences and Being-in-the-World: The Phenomenological Origins of Geography," *Dwelling, Place, and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*, David Seamon and Robert Mugerauer, eds., (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Nijhoff, 1985), 38.

But, then again, not being sure of what the future holds, he uses the expression “I might like here” to mark the uncertainty of the future events or circumstances. He may or may not like it eventually. His desire to like the place depends entirely on the circumstances that lie ahead of him. In representing his deep desire to search for a country in which to love and to live, Head draws the conclusion: “But whatever it was, he simply and silently decided that all this dryness and bleakness amounted to home and that somehow he had come to the end of a journey.”<sup>59</sup> This reads like a self-submission to fate, and to accept whatever comes his way. Sample asks a profound question which is a sharp contrast to Relph’s view. Sample says,

What security lies in a socially sanctioned condemnation to lifelong existence as a subordinate other in a society that daily confirms one’s comparative worthlessness? How can a person become spiritually and psychologically attached to a place that dehumanizes one because of her skin without in turn experiencing some kind of damage to the psyche?<sup>60</sup>

What dehumanises or rather politicises Makhaya in this case is not skin colour per se, but his tribal origin. It means there is a further motive to regard Makhaya as an outsider or stranger who is not welcome. Jean Marguard asserts that, “This unnatural, suspicious and uncomfortable co-existence between exiles and natives compels the exile to take refuge in the comforting knowledge that they will never be understood.”<sup>61</sup> In view of this, Lewis links Head’s exile experience to that of Makhaya:

While Head turns to figure of a San woman [in Maru] to name a specific position of marginality, she turns elsewhere to more fluid metaphoric notions of social marginality. One of the most persisting of these is the figure of the migrant, a figure first explored in the novel *When Rain Clouds Gather*. The flight from South Africa of the novel’s central character, Makhaya echoes Head’s explanation of her own.<sup>62</sup>

Makhaya’s arrival in Botswana from the outset keeps the plot line heightened by moving it from one level of suspense to the other. Again, Makhaya is harassed by the old man’s constant questioning of his identity,

<sup>59</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Sample, “Space: An Experiential Perspective,” 43.

<sup>61</sup> Jean Marguard, “Bessie Head: Exile and Community in Southern Africa,” *London Magazine*. Vol. No. 18, 1979, 55.

<sup>62</sup> Lewis, “Power, Representation and the Textual Politics...” 130.

as he is always interested in collecting the stories of fugitives so that one day, "he would be free to surprise his village with his vast fund of information on fugitives."<sup>63</sup> Next, Makhaya comes across an old woman and a child of about ten years, as he begins his journey to freedom. The old woman displays not only a sharp-tempered attitude, but also, she is a character who obviously prostitutes a ten-year-old child to the men, who come to seek refuge in her home. Makhaya, for example, describes the old woman and the child as "a pair of vultures."<sup>64</sup> And this is because of the way their eyes gleam at him in an unnatural manner and also because of their lifestyles. The old woman refuses to return Makhaya's greetings, but instead demands what is culturally strange to him. Even when he puts his request politely to her that he is looking for a shelter for the night, she bursts out loud with the accusation that he is a spy (quoted above). It is the shout that bothers Makhaya because the border is very near, and at any moment, the patrol van may pass by. He feels scared and embarrassed by her attitude. To him, that is rude because women are not supposed to shout at men, especially where he comes from.

The drama does not end there. To further demonstrate her harsh attitude, she eventually agrees to offer him a shelter but demands that Makhaya must pay ten shillings for a small hut that has some blankets only for a night. Alan Bennett, in *Writing Home*, narrates a similar experience of his character, Guest, who describes the Brontë Bar as "awful conditions, and the winds come straight off Ilkley Moor ...."<sup>65</sup> But, despite all the embarrassments, Makhaya smiles when she insists again that, "I know you are a spy ... You are running away from them [the border police]."<sup>66</sup> He replies: "Perhaps you just want to annoy me. But as you can see, I'm not easily annoyed."<sup>67</sup> Probably he is not easily annoyed in this desperate situation because he has no choice. But to worsen the situation, she does not reply at this point but, instead, she "turned her head and spat on the ground as an eloquent summing up of what she thought of him."<sup>68</sup> This action speaks volumes, as it may refer to Makhaya either as a spy, a liar or a homeless refugee who is looking for a means of survival. Beyond this drama of insult and neglect, he gets another shocking experience. While

<sup>63</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Alan Bennett, *Writing Home* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 54.

<sup>66</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 8.

lying down in the hut, the small child quietly opens the door and closes it behind herself. Makhaya asks: "What do you want?"<sup>69</sup> The little girl of ten years gives an unclear answer, "My grandmother won't mind as long as you pay me."<sup>70</sup> In as much as her reply may appear ambiguous to the reader, Makhaya, in context, clearly understands her intention and dismisses her, saying, "You're just a child."<sup>71</sup> But the girl refuses to leave. As a result, he gives her ten shillings without having sex with her. For him, having sex with a child under the age of consent, is morally and legally wrong. Therefore, Makhaya's refusal to take part in child sex abuse gives a hint as to his moral uprightness.

Later, Makhaya's arrival at Golema Mmidi is something of "luck and chance," as he himself describes it. His arrival sets off a chain of events which essentially become highlights in the plot line. At the time Makhaya arrives at Golema Mmidi, a lot of things have been happening in the village. That is, there is an immense number of hidden conflicts going on. Being a settlement of "misfits", of characters and refugees from diverse regions and areas, there are bound to be conflicts of interests among the residents. The situation is compounded by the nature of the chiefs and sub-chiefs, who are in charge of the settlement and who themselves are at war with one another. Head presents a demographic picture of Golem Mmidi which includes the eruption of continual crises:

Over a period of fourteen years Golema Mmidi had acquired a population of four hundred people, and their permanent settlement there gave rise to small administrative problems ... and problems such as, appeals against banishment, appeals against sentences for using threatening and insulting language to a sub-chief, and appeals against appropriation of property by the sub-chief.<sup>72</sup>

However, all of these have combined to make the village of Golema Mmidi an unparalleled place, as the old man tells the reader, "It was not a village in the usual meaning of being composed of large tribal or family groupings. Golema Mmidi consisted of individuals who had fled there to escape the tragedies of life,"<sup>73</sup> such as Makhaya. Belinda Bozzoli claims,

<sup>69</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 9.

<sup>70</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 9.

<sup>71</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 17.

"It is within the resulting, maelstrom of human suffering that 'communities' are born, survive and die in ways peculiar to the past, the beliefs and habits, the experiences and struggles, of the people themselves."<sup>74</sup>

Golema Mmidi reflects her claim of community-formation in relation to human experience, suffering, struggle, and survival. Golema Mmidi is pictured as a collection of engaged communities by settlement. Golema Mmidi clearly reflects the historical status of Botswana as a home or refuge for the marginalised and dispossessed groups, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively. Lewis makes the historical point that "during the years of mfecane, a period of military upheaval, ethnic conflict and mass migration, Botswana progressively absorbed many of the fleeing groups and individuals during the invasions of the Nguni."<sup>75</sup>

However, what is unique about the village is its name. "Its name too marked it out from the other villages, which were named after important chiefs or important events."<sup>76</sup> But, it acquires "its name from the occupation the villagers followed, which was crop growing."<sup>77</sup> Beyond its name, Golema Mmidi represents one of the few places in Botswana where people are permanently settled on the land, and they are ready to put new ideas to work. For this reason, Botswana is associated with what Head terms "Refugeeism." By this, she simply refers to Botswana as a home of refugees.

As the novel moves to a close in Chap. 12, the plot is on a slope of anticlimax. The men of Golema Mmidi are in tune with Gilbert's visions of domesticating their cattle holding, engaging in farming, and pooling their efforts together. The government intervenes in their tragic situation by sending in emergency rations and constructing a spare borehole for the community. The plot heads for a denouement when Chief Matenge sends for Paulina Sebeso and six old men who sit on the village council to report to his court over a case. The people are apprehensive because "Matenge never called them unless it was to destroy an inhabitant of Golema Mmidi. He had never done one act of kindness towards the villagers, seeming to

<sup>74</sup>Belinda Bozzoli, "Class, Community and Ideology in the Evolution of South African Society," *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives*, Bozzoli Belinda, ed., (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 14.

<sup>75</sup>Lewis, "Power, Representation and the Textual Politics..." 131.

<sup>76</sup>Head, *When Rain*, 17.

<sup>77</sup>Head, *When Rain*, 17.

be placed there only for their torture.”<sup>78</sup> It is an occasion the whole community rises up to as “though they had known this day would arrive when they would all face their persecutor of many years.”<sup>79</sup> The whole village gathers in Matenge’s home in support of their own and ready to express their pent up frustrations because they have been stopped from making progress in their lives by an evil-minded personality in the person of Chief Matenge. Chief Matenge, being frightened at seeing the gathering of the villagers, who seat themselves on the ground waiting for him to come out, barricades himself in the house crying while his servants flee into the bush. After a long wait, the trio of Makhaya, Gilbert, and Pelotong, the permit man, follow the villagers to Chief Matenge’s house to find the strange situation and eventually discover that Chief Matenge has hanged himself from a rafter in his palatial home. The plot ends in catastrophe for Chief Matenge, and could be regarded as poetic justice for all the years of cruelty he has reigned and lorded it over the people of Golema Mmidi. The people are, however, stunned and dazed by the catastrophic end of Chief Matenge, feeling somewhat responsible for his death “in a strange gathering – together of all their wills.”<sup>80</sup> In order not to allow any evil to impose itself on them, they all quickly and silently decide to suppress “it,” which could be interpreted as suppressing the lurking evil in man. The denouement does not end in hopelessness as the marriage proposal from Makhaya to Paulina stamps a note of hope on the ending of the novel.

### MAKHAYA AND THE PANGS OF BELONGING TO A “FREE SOCIETY”

The pains of Makhaya’s exile are more psychological than physical, particularly as he moves in search of a free society. The suspicion that he is a spy still plagues him in his supposedly free ground (Botswana). As previously noted, the old hag says: “I know you are a spy, you are running away from them.”<sup>81</sup> She even tries to shout at him because she knows he is not from Botswana and is perhaps an illegal migrant. And because the border is very near and the patrol van can pass at any moment, he replies in a more desperate voice: “How can you embarrass me like that? Are women

<sup>78</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 184.

<sup>79</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 184.

<sup>80</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 192.

<sup>81</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 7.

of your country taught to shout at men?"<sup>82</sup> He has to lie to the old woman that he comes from over the border, and that he has an appointment to start work in the country the next day.

The young man (Makhaya) who refuses to be corrupted by having sex with a child-prostitute has to lie to find his way in search of a free ground. He also lies to the truck driver when he is asked if he has been to see relatives at the Meraka. Again, he lies that his mother is ill. He even claims to be a teacher. The question is: Should he tell the man he was a refugee? But, "His experiences of the previous night had made him distrustful."<sup>83</sup> The lies continue for a while so that even when he is asked of his tribe, he thinks of a lie that is close to the truth. "What's your tribe?"<sup>84</sup> He pauses for a while, "trying to think of the nearest relationship to Zulus in the northern tribes of Ndebele,"<sup>85</sup> he says. On arrival, Makhaya has to register himself as a refugee, and wisely applies for political asylum. He has the resilience of crossing the barriers of time and culture to survive in an alternative space of belonging.

Connecting Makhaya's predicament to the narrative style, the novel is written from an omniscient point of view which is able to assume the perspectives of different characters. That is, the narrative voice is all knowing and pervasive, and thus, capable of reaching into the innermost thoughts of every character and moving over the land of its setting in a powerful way. When Head's narrative voice engages in probing the secret thoughts of her characters, one can point to a flashback, which seems like a stream of consciousness style in the interior monologue of important characters like Makhaya, Gilbert, Paulina Sebeso, and Chief Matenge. For instance, Head writes about Makhaya,

In his anxiety to get as far away from the border as fast as possible, he hardly felt the intense, penetrating cold of the frosty night. For almost half an hour he sped, blind and deaf and numbed to anything but his major fear. The wail of the siren brought him to an abrupt halt. It sounded shockingly near and he feared that his crashing pace would draw attention to himself.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 7.

<sup>83</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 13.

<sup>84</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 13.

<sup>85</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 13.

<sup>86</sup> Head, *When Rain*, 5.

This written equivalent of his inner reflection on the pains involved in crossing the border points to the workings of his thought processes in such a loose interior monologue, closely connected to his outward actions. His thought processes, characterised by associative deep consciousness, are only brought out of his mind by the narrator or perhaps, the reader can only overhear them in his mind. However, his desperate move to cross over to the supposedly free land, and also, the circumstances that surround him clearly bring to light his inner fear, and describe his physical reaction to his thought though not in a detailed manner.

### CONCLUSION

The issues of tribalism lend authenticity to the themes of migration and exile in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Makhaya is extremely aware of tribalism and when being confronted with the same phenomenon on his way to exile, he compromises his principles to live with tribalism in exile. Theoretically, I refer to this as one instance of *exilic compromise*, a term I have coined to mean a double-standard practised by the exiled person. It is a decisive or psychic surrender to all the factors and forces that compel one into exile in the first place, yet nevertheless an accompanying determination to stay in exile and continue functioning within the new society, either temporarily or permanently. Through compromise, he is able to share his exile with the natives of his adopted country. However, in the story, Head gives prominent attention to more general issues of the human condition. Nkosi neatly summarises almost everything that needs to be said about Head's sympathy for suffering humanity, especially in her three major novels (*When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power*):

We are presented with a rich interplay of character and social scene, and Bessie Head's broad sympathies for the outcast, for the lonely and the mentally broken, are given a convincing social framework. The simplicity of the narrative line, the careful economy of its language, and the poetic fragility of its texture, makes this one of the most exhilarating books to read. Its plea for recognition of the humanity of others is explicit.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup>Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (Harlow: Longman, 1981), 101.

Going beyond Nkosi's rather general humanistic summation, this chapter has concerned itself explicitly with the themes of migration and exile. In constructing the narrative of a testing space for living, the novel projects itself as a bridge to the outside world, as Head herself narrates the confining conditions of belonging to two worlds: that of South Africa and Botswana. I have attempted to shed light on the experience of displacement, and to analyse the production of difference, identity, and place in a labile world of migration, as well as of shifting power and domination. The reader sees Golema-Mmidi as a laboratory of transcultural relations, a place of multiple identities with blurring boundaries, especially as one of the places where Makhaya develops the blend of I-and-the not-I identity necessary to fit into the scheme of things. Head explores the questions of identity and belonging primarily through Makhaya and Gilbert as the two principal exiled characters. She weaves the themes of exile, of history, of post-colonial upheaval, into a narrative about two nation-states, both deformed by tribal prejudice but in one of which there is some hope for the future. Makhaya and Gilbert are able to re-create a new fabric of their homes, communities, families, and identities in the context of exile. Finally, this chapter envisages a multicultural world, where people of different races, languages, cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities could have a hand shake and march towards the drum of love, as it is the hope of Head, and, I believe, the hope of all those who share her liberal views of our common humanity.

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## CHAPTER 6

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# Ingrid de Kok's "A Room Full of Questions" and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

*Michael Sharp*

## INTRODUCTION

After President Hendrik Verwoerd was assassinated in the South African parliament in 1966, it was rumored that his ghost still haunted the chamber. This story was perpetuated by the National Party (NP), which was reluctant to remove the blood stains after the attack. The poet Antjie Krog remembers talking to a cleaner who explained that the carpets had been washed and that the NP, which instituted apartheid in 1948, was apparently content with the symbol until someone placed a rug over it. Eventually everything was dry-cleaned, but a day or two later, the stain

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was back,<sup>1</sup> symbolizing, as Terry Bell has suggested, that South Africa is still erasing “the most horrific racist social engineering of modern time.”<sup>2</sup>

The country, first occupied by Dutch protestants in 1652 and then the British from 1795, was the first settler-colony on the African continent. Regarding the country as “the Promised Land” the original settlers planted the seeds of Dutchification, which theologically justified the policies of racial, cultural, and linguistic superiority in *Suid Afrika*. While the British instituted their own “Anglicization” policies ironically giving non-whites a language of liberation in the years to come, it was the Afrikaners who, despite losing the Boer War 1902, bequeathed to the founders of the NP the credo of separate development. In Toyin Falola’s words: “That apartheid would end and Mandela would move from jail to power was an event no one could anticipate even in the preceding decade. It was also an event that closed the book on European colonial domination of Africa.”<sup>3</sup>

If South Africa is still a “stained place,” as Ingrid de Kok has written, it is a country where poets must continue to speak for “the Harmed Ones,”<sup>4</sup> those victims who were trapped in apartheid’s “web of infinite sorrow.”<sup>5</sup> If South Africa is to be fully cleansed of its tainted past, the poet’s duty is to invoke “whole words ... deep-sea anemone vowels, / birth-cable syntax, rhymes that start in the heart/ and verbs, verbs that move mountains.”<sup>6</sup> It is the burden of the poet to write the past into the present in words that speak deeply to a new country emerging from colonial oppression through a regime change that eventually saw the first democratic election in its history and the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first black president of South Africa in May 1994.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*. (New York: Three Rivers Press 1999), 161.

<sup>2</sup> Terry Bell, with Dumisa Buhle Ntsebeza. *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and Truth*. (London: Verso, 2003), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Toyin Falola, *Key Events in African History: A Reference Guide*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 328.

<sup>4</sup> *Terrestrial Things*. (Plumstead, South Africa: Kwela Books – Snail Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Krog, 45.

<sup>6</sup> de Kok, 21.

<sup>7</sup> F.W. de Klerk and Thabo Mbeki were inaugurated as Executive Deputy Presidents.

## REGIME CHANGE

Regime change had been in the air since Nelson Mandela's release from prison in the Western Cape in February 1990. This occurred one week after President F.W. de Klerk's NP had unbanned the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress, and the South African Communist Party (SACP). In March of the same year, Namibia, formerly South West Africa, became independent. In early 1992, de Klerk won a "whites-only" referendum to approve high-level talks with the ANC. This was followed in May by the Groote Schuur Accord,<sup>8</sup> which paved the way for historic negotiations between de Klerk's nationalists and the opposition. This in turn led to the drafting of a "Ready to Govern" document by the ANC in May 1992, and the beginning of a "rolling mass action campaign"<sup>9</sup> to garner votes from all ethnic groups for the national election in 1994.

Despite internecine strife in 1992—the Boipatong massacre carried out by Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) supporters, the killing of ANC marchers in the Ciskei, and the assassination of Chris Hani, the popular general secretary of SACP<sup>10</sup>—an Interim Constitution was adopted in November 1993. After the ANC victory in April 1994, the Constitutional Assembly adopted a progressive constitution which included a Constitutional Court, an Independent Electoral Commission, a Human Rights Commission, and a Commission for Gender Equality.

<sup>8</sup>The Groote Schuur Minute of 4th May 1990 begins "The government and the African National Congress agree on a common commitment towards the resolution of the existing climate of violence and intimidation from whatever quarter as well as a commitment to stability and a peaceful process of negotiations." See [www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za)

<sup>9</sup>See Allister Sparks *Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), 346.

<sup>10</sup>The Boipatong massacre involved the slaughtering of 46 people—mainly women and children—by Zulu supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party on the night of 17 June 1992 at the Kwa Madela hostel for migrant workers. The massacre – ironically in the symbolic vicinity of Sharpeville – caused the ANC to walk out on negotiations between themselves and the NP. The Bisho massacre took place on 7 September 1992. Out of 26 ANC supporters were killed by the Ciskei Defence Force as they marched to demand reincorporation of the nominally independent homeland. The highly respected leader of the SAPC Martin Thembisile (Chris) Hani was murdered by two Afrikaner extremists associated with the Afrikaner Weestandsbeweging (AWB), a white nationalist resistance group on 10 April 1993. Both killers—Clive Derby-Lewis and Janusz Walus—believed that Hani was a representative of the Anti-Christ.

As in Chile after the fall of the Pinochet dictatorship,<sup>11</sup> a consequence of regime change in South Africa was the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was representative of South African society and aimed at healing the country's "wounded memories."<sup>12</sup> This had been foreshadowed by the sworn confession to the Lawyers for Human Rights of a former death-squad thug named Butana Almond Nofomela<sup>13</sup> on the eve of his execution. This confession led to the exposure by the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Vrye Weekblad* (Free Weekly)<sup>14</sup> of the activities of Government-sanctioned hit-men, and specifically to the trial of the former policeman, Eugene de Kock<sup>15</sup> for multiple murders committed at Vlakplaas, a government death-farm<sup>16</sup> near Pretoria in the 1980s.

<sup>11</sup> Krog notes that the Chilean philosopher and human rights activist José Zalaquett believed that "in Chile as in South Africa, the overthrown regime is part of the new government and still has enough power to obstruct the inquests into any abuses or to start a new civil war," 31. Pinochet's presidency ended in 1990 when he stepped down as head of state, but he remained head of the army and was later made a senator for life. Arrested in Britain in 1996, he was returned to Chile to stand trial on tax evasion charges rather than for crimes against humanity.

<sup>12</sup> Mandela signed the Truth Commission Bill on 19 July 1996. The phrase is Desmond Tutu's. See *No Future Without Forgiveness*. (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 25.

<sup>13</sup> An independent human rights organization founded in 1979 to "change and to deepen the democratization of the South Africa society." See [www.lhr.org.za](http://www.lhr.org.za)

<sup>14</sup> The *Rand Daily Mail* closed in 1985 after 83 years of publication. It had a reputation for treating non-whites as human beings, and its pointed reporting of the Sharpeville massacre raised eyebrows in Pretoria. The Afrikaans *Vrye Weekblad* was founded in 1988 and continued publishing until 1994. It was notable for its daring disclosures of Government-sponsored death squads and the death-farm Vlakplaas. The journalist Jacques Pauw, who was on the editorial board of *Vrye Weekblad*, has called its editor Max du Preeze "daring and fearless" and the paper "independent and free-thinking" (see *In the Heart of the Whore*, 19). It folded after being unable to bear the costs of defending itself against a libel suit brought by Lothar Neethling whom the newspaper had rightly accused of supplying poison to the South African security forces to be used against ANC and other anti-apartheid groups.

<sup>15</sup> Eugene De Kock was known as "Prime Evil" and is a symbol of apartheid's unspeakable violence. He is said to have been personally involved in over 70 killings for *Volk en Vaderland* (Folk and Fatherland). Pumla Gobodo-Manikizela, a TRC commissioner and psychologist, after interviewing de Kock in prison, asks the question: "Was evil intrinsic to de Kock, and forgiveness therefore wasted on him?" She answers her own question by remembering Albie Sachs's insistence that it was important "to see these men's humanity." Sachs, a human rights lawyer, lost an arm during an assassination attempt in Maputo, Mozambique, in 1988: See Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 45.

<sup>16</sup> Vlakplaas, a police death-farm on the Hennops river near the nation's capital of Pretoria, is synonymous now in South Africa with brutality, torture, and murder. Death farms were

## THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

The first hearing of the TRC was convened in the seaside town of East London in April 1996. Desmond Tutu,<sup>17</sup> the archbishop *emeritus* of Cape Town, had been entrusted to chair a series of hearings in town halls around the country to listen to the testimony of the victims of apartheid violence: mothers whose sons had been drugged, shot, and *braaid* (barbecued),<sup>18</sup> wives whose husbands had been wrongly incarcerated, men and women whose kin had been beaten, raped, tortured, disappeared, poisoned, or murdered by Pretoria's security forces between the Sharpeville massacre in 1960<sup>19</sup> and the historic inauguration of Mandela in 1994. A smaller judicial committee was set up to hear amnesty applications from nearly 8000 people whose claim for clemency could only be considered if they proved that their actions were of a political nature.

Bitter rivalry existed between the NP, which had instituted "good neighborliness" in 1948,<sup>20</sup> and the ANC's demands, argued by its deputy

dotted all over the country from the Western Cape to Old Natal. Some farms simply housed, turned, and trained *askaris*, some were for interrogation, torture, and killing, while others were places where victims' bodies were dumped and buried or burned. Seeing photographs of the Vlakplaas *manne* at play, Jacques Pauw, was struck by how "suspiciously homoerotic" their cavorting was as they paraded their *boepies* (beer bellies) and "playfully pulled one another's swimsuits down." See *Dances with Devils*, 146.

<sup>17</sup> *Apropos* Mandela and Tutu (and Mbeki), Allister Sparks quotes the novelist Olive Schreiner: "What South Africa calls for today is no hero or saint or impossible figment of the mind, simply a man with a clear head and a large heart, organically incapable of self-seeking or racial prejudice." Schreiner was probably "thinking in white terms," Sparks says, "but what she meant ... was someone imbued with the spirit of *ubuntu*." *The Mind of South Africa* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 399.

<sup>18</sup> A euphemism for the burning of human remains. To conceal evidence, this was done on the traditional Afrikaner *braai* (BBQ) after a victim had been first beaten, then drugged, then killed. An infamous case in 1981 involved the activist Goiniswhe Kondile who, having fallen foul of the security forces, was given a spiked drink, shot, and then "burned on a pyre of bushveld wood" while his captors sat around drinking beer and roasting their own meat. See *In the Heart of the Whore*, 52–55.

<sup>19</sup> A township south of Johannesburg and the scene of a massacre by police of 69 people protesting the pass laws which restricted the movement of blacks into the cities. This prompted the Verwoerd government to ban the ANC and PAC, who then resorted to a guerrilla campaign which continued into the 1990s.

<sup>20</sup> President P. W. Botha's "English translation" of the Afrikaans "apartheid" or "apartness". This later became slightly more innocuously known as "separate development." Despite being implemented as state policy in 1948, apartheid in one form or another extends back to the beginning of Dutch settlement in South Africa in 1652.

leader Thabo Mbeki, for exemption from amnesty application because it had prosecuted a legitimate war of liberation. These rifts, together with the still unresolved black-on-black violence between the ANC and the IFP which had claimed some 20,000 lives between 1983 and 1996, complicated the TRC's daunting task of healing "a deeply traumatized wounded and polarized society."<sup>21</sup>

Tutu, who has written that voting for the first time in 1994 was "like falling in love,"<sup>22</sup> was the perfect man to chair the TRC. Antjie Krog, who covered the hearings for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) recalls that he caressed "everyone with pieces of hope and humanity."<sup>23</sup> The man who coined the phrase "Rainbow Nation" brought as his credo the Bantu saying *Ubuntu ungumuntu ngabanye abantu* (people are people through other people).<sup>24</sup> This concept which embraces the very essence of being human and which is the text of the Archbishop's own belief in a reconciliation theology was fiercely tested by hours of harrowing testimony. Like Mandela, who emerged from 27 years in prison without any apparent feelings of revenge, Tutu's presiding over the hearings was equally admirable as he listened—often in tears, sometimes in anger—to a litany of unspeakable crimes against humanity. Tutu's watch was exacerbated by the embattled state's reasons—and excuses—for separate development, enforced resettlement, the pass laws, the banning of opposition parties, the imposition of Afrikaans, murder-for-hire, and a policy of "Total Strategy"<sup>25</sup> all in the guise of South Africa's obsessive war with communism.

Tutu, like Mandela, was deeply aware of the *Volksgeist* (Folk Spirit), the motivation of *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) that drove most white

<sup>21</sup> Alec Russell. *Bring Me My Machine Gun: The Battle for the Soul of South Africa from Mandela to Zuma*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 35.

<sup>22</sup> *No Future Without Forgiveness*. (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Krog, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Russell, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Sometimes known as "Total Onslaught," this was President P.W. Botha's instruction to a newly-formed National Security Management System (1984) which effectively declared war on any form of opposition to the apartheid system. See Sparks, *Beyond the Miracle*, 153–54. According to Sparks, Botha was a contradictory die-hard racist and "a difficult man with an explosive temper" who—often against his own party—nevertheless abolished the pass laws, gave "colored" people the vote in their separate parliamentary chambers, increased the budget for black education, and scrapped the laws that prohibited interracial marriage. See Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Road to Change*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 68.

Afrikaners inward and outward on a spiritual version of the Great Trek.<sup>26</sup> He was appalled that the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) sanctioned apartheid theologically, that it seemed little more than the NP at prayer.<sup>27</sup> Tutu was also troubled by the "cognitive dissonance"<sup>28</sup> of a devoutly religious people imposing an unjust system of racial inequality on another. He knew intuitively, even before Mrs. Nomande Calata's primeval wail<sup>29</sup> at the first hearing reduced him to uncontrollable sobs, that the TRC, in Teilhard de Chardin's words, promised absolutely that "a new earth [was] being slowly engendered"<sup>30</sup> in South Africa. "In forgiving," Tutu wrote in 1996, "people are not being asked to forget."<sup>31</sup>

Even Tutu's bountiful sense of *ubuntu* and Christian decency was unable to move the immovable Winnie Madikizela-Mandela after allegations surfaced that the former wife of the president was the god-mother of a "club" of black thugs who terrorized the Johannesburg section of Soweto in the late 1980s. When Madikizela-Mandela was questioned about her role as matron of the Mandela United Football Club in the murder of a 14-year-old activist, Stompie Seipei, and the slandering of a

<sup>26</sup> In *The Mind of South Africa* (New York: Knopf, 1990), Allister Sparks quotes the architect of apartheid, D. M. Malan, the first president of the racist state: "Alas, the trek does not lead from the straits into the open spaces. This is a trek from a condition of freedom and abundance to one of poverty and want. This is a journey from Canaan to Egypt," 119. For the Boers, Sparks writes, "boundaries" and the Great Trek they undertook in 1836 was partly due to their "bitterness ... over the imperial government's piecemeal granting of rights to people of color," 105–106.

<sup>27</sup> After Mandela's election, Tutu accepted an invitation to preach "at a posh white Dutch Reformed Church in Lynwood, Pretoria." This he did after the Synod of the DRC "apologized handsomely and publicly" for upholding "apartheid theologically." See *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 184–85.

<sup>28</sup> Sparks quotes Leon Festinger's *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957) in *The Mind of South Africa* and adds that his "theory holds that where there is such dissonance between belief and behavior, a psychological need to reduce the tension will bring about an attitude change," 153.

<sup>29</sup> "The starting point of the human rights hearings was the indefinable wail that burst from Nomande Calata's lips in East London," Krog, 75. In Alex Boraine's memoir of his time serving as a commissioner on the TRC, *A Country Unmasked* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Mrs. Calata's wail is remembered as "primeval and spontaneous," 102. Tutu writes: "Mrs. Calata broke down with a piercing wail. In many ways, her cry was the defining sound of the TRC—as a place where people could come to cry, to open their hearts, to expose the anguish that had remained locked up for so long, unacknowledged, ignored, and denied," 148.

<sup>30</sup> Tutu, 266.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

Methodist clergyman, Paul Verryn,<sup>32</sup> by insinuating that he was a child-molester and sodomite, her answers to the TRC were often off-handedly nonverbal or simply punctuated with pompous responses like “ludicrous” or “ridiculous.”<sup>33</sup>

Recognizing Madikezela-Mandela’s “role in the history of our struggle,” Tutu begged the former First Lady of the nation “to say, ‘I’m sorry’ ... ‘things went wrong. Forgive me.’” Madikizela-Mandela’s noncommittal reply to Tutu’s impassioned plea was: “I am saying it is true: things went horribly wrong and we were aware that there were factors that led to that. For that I am deeply sorry.”<sup>34</sup> Alex Boraine, recalling his time as a commissioner on the TRC, wrote that an acknowledgment of “accountability” on Midikezela-Mandela’s part “could have led to a pardon.”<sup>35</sup>

One problem the TRC had was handling testimony given in the 11 official languages of South Africa. While there were simultaneous translations from English into Afrikaans into Xhosa, there were predictable linguistic disputes within the TRC and the multi-lingual country over the exact meaning of specific words pertinent to the task of the Commission itself. Antjie Krog cites, as an example, the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of “reconciliation”—“to make friendly again”; however, the Xhosa word for “reconciliation” is “uxolelwano,” which has a meaning much closer to “forgiveness.” She adds to the definition of reconciliation such words and phrases as *accommodate*, *provide*, *make space for*, *understand*, *tolerate*, *emphasize*, and *endure*. “Piece by piece we die into reconciliation,” Krog wrote, adding her own ambiguous caution: “Truth and reconciliation do not enter my anarchy. They choke on betrayal and rage; they fall off my refusal to be moral.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Stompie Seipei, on the run from the Orange Free State police, had taken refuge in the manse of Paul Verryn (later a Methodist bishop). Found guilty in 1991 of kidnaping Stompie from the manse, Madikizela-Mandela accused Verryn of sodomy. The accusation was damaging but unsubstantiated, and yet Verryn had the good heart to forgive Madikizela-Mandela: despite being “profoundly, profoundly affected by some of the things” she said of him. Verryn assured Madikizela-Mandala that “I long for our reconciliation,” Krog, 327. The “coach” of the Mandela United Football Club, Jerry Richardson was later found guilty of murdering Stompie whose decomposed body was found on the veld in early 1989.

<sup>33</sup> Krog, 336.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 338–339.

<sup>35</sup> Boraine, 255.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 50.

Krog's ambiguity reflected the mood of South Africa in the 1990s. There was, on the one hand, the ANC slogan "One settler, one bullet;"<sup>37</sup> on the other hand, the pervasive belief on the part of blacks that "the whites have no ubuntu."<sup>38</sup> Additionally, there was the Afrikaner Broederbond's<sup>39</sup> conviction that blacks were not human and the Boer distaste for *bloedvermenging* (racial mixing) and "mishmash cohabitation."<sup>40</sup> While the rhetoric of liberation pales before the "moral vacuity"<sup>41</sup> of apartheid, the "ideological morgue"<sup>42</sup> of separate development, there was a justified fear that the country would flare up into another Angola or Mozambique with no end to ethnic resentment in sight.

A couple of months before the 2700-page TRC report was made public in October 1998, the commissioners were legally obliged to provide summaries of their findings to some 200 people and organizations linked to human rights violations. The list included the former presidents Botha and de Klerk, Chief Buthelezi of the IFP, several members of the ANC, and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. De Klerk, Martin Meredith notes, was "livid that he had been named "an accessory to gross human rights violations,"<sup>43</sup> especially since the former president had testified to the TRC that when he authorized operations against the liberation movements, they did not include official permission to torture or murder activists. Similarly, the ANC was outraged that it had been condemned

<sup>37</sup> Meredith, 273.

<sup>38</sup> Krog, 59.

<sup>39</sup> "The apartheid system worked like a finely woven net—starting with the Broederbond who appointed leaders. In turn these leaders appointed ministers, judges, generals, security forces, courts, administrations, were tangled in. Through Parliament, legislation was launched that would keep the brutal enforcement out of sight," See Krog, 60. In *The Mind of South Africa*, Sparks notes that the organization dates from 1918 and then writes: "The Broederbond is a remarkable organization, perhaps unequalled in the world for its pervasive back-room power wielded over nearly every aspect of natural life. It has been the nucleus of the Afrikaner Nationalist movement, exercising its influence over both church and state and establishing a wide network of social, cultural, and economic institutions to help uplift the Afrikaner people, weld them together, and mobilize them politically," 176.

<sup>40</sup> Krog quotes a certain Dr. Sean Kaliski, 119. See also *The Mind of South Africa*, 175–179.

<sup>41</sup> Pauw quotes Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, former leader of the Official Opposition in Parliament, *In the Heart of the Whore*, unpaginated.

<sup>42</sup> Terry Bell's phrase for apartheid South Africa, 139.

<sup>43</sup> *Coming to Terms: South Africa's Search for the Truth*. (New York: Public Affairs, 1990), 302.

for war crimes and accused the TRC of “criminalizing the anti-apartheid struggle.”<sup>44</sup> Chief Butelezi of the IFP, believing all along that the TRC was an “apparatus to conduct witch-hunting,”<sup>45</sup> claimed that his hands were clean, that he “never ordered, authorized, ratified, condoned, or failed to prosecute any gross violation of human rights.”<sup>46</sup>

Tutu acknowledged that the TRC report would upset a lot of people. Thabo Mbeki, the Executive Deputy President, had insisted that reconciliation would “only be possible if whites say: apartheid was evil and we were responsible for resisting it.”<sup>47</sup> Realizing that if Mbeki’s demand was not acknowledged, then reconciliation would no longer be on the ANC’s agenda, the Archbishop reminded everyone that “apartheid could not have survived for a single day had it not been supported” by what he called the “enfranchised privileged minority.”<sup>48</sup>

Once the dust had settled on the initial reaction to the TRC’s final report, Tutu inveighed against “whites” who, despite losing their political clout after 1994, still had most of the resources that they had enjoyed under apartheid rule. “Let us invest all we have,” Tutu advised, “to make this thing succeed, otherwise one day the blacks will really get angry that political change has brought no change for them materially and there will not be Mandela to help control them.”<sup>49</sup>

Two examples of the difficulties faced by many of the victims of violence prior to regime change will suffice. The first is the reaction of Siswe Kondile’s mother to the brutal killing and then slow immolation of her activist son on a *Vlakplaas braai*: “It is easy for Mandela and Tutu to forgive.... They lead vindicated lives. In my life nothing, not a single thing, has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians ... nothing. Therefore, I cannot forgive.”<sup>50</sup> The second is the reaction of the television repair man Hennie Smit whose eight-year-old son, Cornio, was killed in 1985 by a bomb blast in the Sanlam Shopping Center in Amanzimtoti, Natal:

<sup>44</sup> Meredith, 302.

<sup>45</sup> Buthelezi’s comments are included in “Bones of Memory,” cd 1. *South Africa’s Human Spirit: An Oral Memoir of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 6 cd’s. Johannesburg: PSD Promotions, 2000.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted by Krog, 77.

<sup>48</sup> Tutu, 217.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted by Meredith, 85.

I told newspapers that I thought my son was a hero, because he died for freedom ... he died in the cause of the oppressed people. A lot of people criticized me for this. They thought I was a traitor and they condemned me. But I still feel that way today.<sup>51</sup>

Acknowledging the leaps of faith that accepting the concepts of truth and reconciliation involved and trusting that a "civic confessional" was essential to the making of a new South Africa, Tutu wrote that the TRC report offered "a road map to those who wish to travel to our past."<sup>52</sup> The best that could be hoped for was "the emergence of a common memory," one in which there was, in Tutu's terms, a good Christian predisposition toward forgiveness despite the traumatic events forced on the countless victims of apartheid. If not, as the Afrikaner poet Ingrid Jonker warned, an oppressed and oppressing South Africa would remain "in the locations of the cordoned heart."<sup>53</sup>

### A ROOM FULL OF QUESTIONS

After listening to hours of agonizing testimony, Antjie Krog pronounced that "no poetry should come forth"<sup>54</sup> from the apartheid era. Nevertheless, Ingrid de Kok, in an embedded sequence entitled "A Room Full of Questions" in *Terrestrial Things* (2004) has given poignant moments from the TRC's findings an ineradicable place in South Africa's cultural record.

In an earlier collection of poems, *Familiar Grounds* (1988), de Kok voices how dangerous it was to be a poet, of any color, in a South Africa, where "The bird of state has talons" and that its "shit drops like lead" on all who opposed it. "Its metal wings," she writes, "corrode the street, / in

<sup>51</sup> Quoted by Jillian Edelstein. *Truth & Lies: Stories from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa*. (New York: The New Press, 2001), 204. Edelstein, a photographer, includes a beautiful portrait of Smit cradling a white dove.

<sup>52</sup> The sociologist Deborah Posel's phrase, after the French philosopher Michel Foucault's notion of "confessing societies." Quoted in Charles Villa-Vicencio & Fannie du Toit. *Truth & Reconciliation in South Africa: Ten Years On*. (Claremont, South Africa: David Philip, 2006), 92. The Tutu quotation is unpaginated.

<sup>53</sup> *Selected Poems*, translated from the Afrikaans by Jack Cope and William Plomer. London: Cape, 1968, 27. Nelson Mandela read Jonker's Afrikaans poem "The child who was shot dead by soldiers at Nyanga" at the opening of the first democratic parliament in May 1994.

<sup>54</sup> Krog, 66.

hatches of blood.”<sup>55</sup> Referencing the imposition of apartheid, de Kok concludes hopefully that while “Forty years ago the house was built/ to hold private unhappiness intact,” the “high veld birds” are circling, “weighing their metronomic blossoms/upon the branches in the winter air. / And the exiles are returning.”<sup>56</sup> Until they do, the vast majority of non-white South Africans would continue to feel that “sorrow is incurable;/a bruised and jagged scar/in the rift valley of the body;/shrapnel seeded in the skin;/un-doused burning pyres of war.”<sup>57</sup> The reconciliation following regime change, she implies in “The Resurrection Bush,” might bring to the “Scorched bushveld ... one chance cup of rain.”<sup>58</sup> For de Kok, the TRC hearings paved the way for a “scoring, scripting, scarring, stitching,” and “invisible mending of the heart”<sup>59</sup> of South Africa. The testimonies of victim and perpetrator alike would be “scraped from resinous tongues” and “transposed” by poetry into a “dialect of record.”<sup>60</sup>

The public sobbing of Desmond Tutu and the eerie ululation of Nomonde Calata for her murdered husband were the anguished cries of the first day of the TRC hearings in East London. The Archbishop’s weeping and Mrs. Calata’s wail are indelibly scored into the music of the new South Africa: “That’s how it began”, de Kok writes, “after a few hours of testimony/the Archbishop wept. / He put his grey head/on the long table/of papers and protocols/ and he wept.”<sup>61</sup>

The full horror of what really happened in South Africa, the minds behind the mind-numbing evil of such crimes as wet-bagging, gang-rape, dismemberment, necklacing, and murder may never be fully comprehended. The terrifying possibility that “[t]he insane do not feel guilt”<sup>62</sup> remains in the emotional deep-structure of the heart-rending testimonies of the victims of racial violence and the amnesty-seeking groveling of Vlakplaas operatives like Dirk Coetzee and his fellow killers.<sup>63</sup> “Old sorrow

<sup>55</sup>From *Familiar Grounds* in *Seasonal Fires: New and Selected Poems*. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 49.

<sup>56</sup>From *Transfer* (1997) in *Seasonal Fires*, 58.

<sup>57</sup>*Seasonal Fires*, 63.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>60</sup>*Terrestrial Things*, 21.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>62</sup>Krog, quoting the American poet Frank Bidart, 113.

<sup>63</sup>During his amnesty hearing, Coetzee admitted killing Siswe Kondile and then drinking beer as Siswe’s body was turned on the *braai*.

holds down anger like a plug," de Kok writes in "How to Mourn in a Room Full of Questions." The poem concerns the senseless killing of a little boy. All the "juridical questions" that the TRC asked could not in the end "swab the brains and blood off the floor."<sup>64</sup>

During the hearings, de Kok noticed how inarticulate many of the victims became: "no spit, sound, swallow. /Voice in a bottle." In "Tongue-Tied," the poet senses that some voices needed help in expressing their feelings. Speaking for a female victim, de Kok attempts the unsayable, slips into babble, speaks her stultifying terror: "They came for the children, took, then me, /and then, then afterwards/the bucket bled. My ears went still. / I'm older than my mother when/ ... "That's the truth. So help. Whole. To tell."<sup>65</sup>

In terms of spectacle, the most frightening "performance" to emerge from the TRC hearings was that of Jeffrey Benzien. A former Murder and Robbery officer, Benzien had been promoted to the elite ranks of the security police because of his unusual persuasive skills. Nationally feared, Benzien was apartheid's torturer. He excelled with the electrode, the rectal probe, and the infamous wet-bag, a forerunner of water-boarding. Antjie Krog recalls that the sight of this "bluntly built white man" in a stuffy hall in Cape Town, "squatting on the back of a black victim, who lies face down on the floor, and pulling a blue bag over his head remains one of the most loaded and disturbing images in the life of the Truth Commission."<sup>66</sup>

De Kok's poem "What Kind of Man?" takes its title from a question asked Benzien by one of his surviving victims, Tony Yengeni: "What kind of man are you? ... I am talking about the man behind the wet bag." Benzien, who had belatedly sought psychiatric help before the hearing, answered: "I ask myself the same question."<sup>67</sup> De Kok, affected by the "deadly erotic mimicry" of the torturer expertly demonstrating his skill, writes not only of South Africa but also of other hearts of darkness beating elsewhere in the world asks: "What kind of man are you?" Benzien's "performance" was so "unbelievable", de Kok continues, that it looked like "a pillow fight between brothers" and reiterates "What kind of man are you"?

<sup>64</sup> *Terrestrial Things*, 23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Krog, 93.

<sup>67</sup> *Terrestrial Things*, 25.

In “Revenge of the Imagination,” de Kok prefaces her poem with a statement by its subject, Margaret Madlana, who appeared before a TRC hearing in Alexandra Township near Johannesburg in 1996: “I would like to apologize before God ... if ever I was to be employed, I was going to poison the white-man’s children. The way they killed my son hitting him against a rock ... I will never forgive ... I will never rest ... I used to go out and sleep on top of his grave.” Margaret Mandala’s submission and De Kok’s poem corroborate, for example, the difficulty of living by Tutu’s liberating belief in *ubuntu*: Charity Kondile could not forgive Dirk Coetzee and his Vlakplaas comrades for killing her son, Nomande Calata could not forgive the killers who brutally murdered her husband with three others<sup>68</sup> near the Eastern Cape town of Craddock and whose bodies were later discovered in sand dunes near Port Elizabeth. “Margaret Madlana,” writes de Kok, “in the nursery of her imagination /... puts rat poison in the ribena of the four-year-old/and in the schoolboy’s warm breakfast milk:/and who can judge her?” The poem ends: “Which one, like Isaac, /his head on a rocky altar, /will we sacrifice in mind/to our dazed and shadowy/reverie of revenge, of recovery?”<sup>69</sup> “True forgiveness,” Desmond Tutu, has written, “deals with the past ... to make the future possible. We cannot go on nursing grudges even vicariously for those who cannot speak for themselves any longer. We have to accept that what we do for generations past, present, and yet to come. That is what makes a community a community or a people a people.”<sup>70</sup>

The Bisho massacre in Ciskei<sup>71</sup> in 1992 of 26 ANC supporters demanding re-integration with the republic shocked most South Africans. In a public statement, Nelson Mandela reminded the nation of “the profound illness” that still afflicted “a country traumatized by centuries of colonial violence and the most brutal exploitation.”<sup>72</sup> When the head of the Ciskei Defense Force, Major-General Marius Oelschig appeared before the TRC apologizing that he could not apologize for “loved ones ... lost and injured” by his soldiers. “I am a soldier,” he continued, “and I have been taught to hide my own tears, and I have been taught to grieve on my

<sup>68</sup>The Craddock Four – Fort Calata, Matthew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhonto, Secelo Mhlawuli – were anti-apartheid activists and members of the United Democratic Front.

<sup>69</sup>*Terrestrial Things*, 28–29.

<sup>70</sup>Tutu, 279.

<sup>71</sup>A former semi-independent homeland (Bantustan) in the Eastern cape, Ciskei was re-incorporated into the Republic of South Africa on 27 April 1994.

<sup>72</sup>See [www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley](http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley)

own."<sup>73</sup> In de Kok's poem "A commander grieves on his own," the eponymous hero knowing that "bodies fell in disarray," that his "ominous orders/shouted into blood and brokenness," foregoes "public forgiveness" and holds "mute his grief and guilt."

De Kok also considers the men and women who both transcribed the testimonies and recorded the evidence heard at the TRC hearings. Assuming the persona of an "anonymous after-hours scribe" in "The Transcriber Speaks," de Kok asks "how to transcribe silence from tapes? / Is weeping a pause or a word? / What written sign for a strangled throat/ And a witness pointing/... What if she stared?" The transcribe concludes rhetorically "The witness was silent. There was nothing left to say?"

Caught in an equally Kafkaesque dilemma, De Kok's "sound engineer" records: "Listen, cut; comma, cut;/ Edit, pain; connect, pain; broadcast pain;? Listen, cut; comma, cut." As the engineer's "instrumental ear/records the lesions of eroded land/while blood drums the vellum of the brain," a "stain" hovers "over the studio recording table" like "a small red butterfly."<sup>74</sup>

"Today, Again" concerns a woman who testified that she had to "scoop up" the remains of her son in her bare hands and put them in a bucket. "If we go on like this," de Kok warns, "everyone will know somebody this week dead /watch somebody die, kill somebody/or film it, write about it."<sup>75</sup> Prefacing "Some There Be" with a quotation from the *Apocrypha*—"and some there be, which have no memorial, who are perished as though they had never been"—De Kok asks: "Can the forgotten/be born again/into a land of names?"<sup>76</sup> In "Body Parts," the plea is for South Africa's "severed foot ... punctured ear ... molten eye ... faltering lungs ... maimed hand ... unfixable broken bone ..." to "give us new bearings."<sup>77</sup> If the past is not to be forgotten, if past sins are to be spoken about openly and perhaps forgiven, it will be imperative, de Kok writes in "Sticks and Stones," that new South Africans "*read the bones*."<sup>78</sup> If not, as the Irish poet W.B. Yeats warns, "Too long a sacrifice/Can make a stone of the heart,"<sup>79</sup> as Ingrid de Kok warns, "the cronies of steel and stone"<sup>80</sup> will return.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted by de Kok, 30.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 33–34.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>79</sup> From "Easter 1916" in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), 177.

<sup>80</sup> From "Bring the statues back" in *Seasonal Fires*, 143.

## CONCLUSION

Martin Meredith quotes an open letter to Mandela and Tutu written in April 1998 by the controversial South African journalist, Jon Qwelane:

Is it not simply amazing that black South Africans are the only people in the entire history of humankind expected to hug and kiss their oppressors, and to love them unconditionally like brothers and sisters, while the new-found family members give nothing in return except scorn, derision and absolute contempt for our dignity as a people?<sup>81</sup>

Complaining of Mandela and Tutu's "one-sided brand of reconciliation," Qwelane requested that they should desist "before it causes irreparable damage to the psyche of the black people of this country."<sup>82</sup> Despite Qwelane's letter, opinion polls and surveys taken after the TRC report was published seemed to show that South Africans were more optimistic that they could live together harmoniously. Meredith cites a July 1998 survey that showed that 60% believed that the TRC had been fair to everyone. However, when black-white opinions were factored in, 80% thought that the TRC hearings had made race relations worse. This dispiriting statistic<sup>83</sup> drew an angry retort from Tutu in the *Johannesburg Star*:

It surely would have been odd in the extreme had not people been incensed at the atrocities that have been revealed. What did we expect? Surely not that the Bopape family would dance with joy to hear that their son was tortured to death and that his body was fed to crocodiles – while police engaged in an elaborate and macabre cover-up.

Tutu went on to defend the TRC by citing courageous examples of forgiveness shown by Beth Savage, a white woman who had been badly hurt during an attack at the King William's Town golf club, the previously mentioned Hennie Smit who believed his son had died in the cause of freedom, and the family of Amy Biehl, an American exchange student

<sup>81</sup> *Coming to Terms*, 318.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Meredith cites the July 1998 survey: "some 72 percent of whites felt that the TRC had made race relations worse; almost 70 percent felt that the TRC would not help South Africans live together more harmoniously in the future; and some 83 percent of Afrikaners and 71 percent of English-speaking whites believed the TRC to be biased. In effect, it was a massive vote of no confidence," 315.

killed by a mob in the Western Cape, whose mother publicly forgave her murderers. Tutu fumed that the white community and former president F.D. de Klerk should have simply said "We had a bad policy that had evil consequences. We are sorry. Please forgive us." That neither de Klerk nor the white community did, Meredith comments, was "nothing more than most [blacks] had expected,"<sup>84</sup>

Regime change in South Africa brought about the unbanning of political parties, the release from prison and return from exile of many of apartheid's opponents, the dismantling of separate development, and the first democratic election in the country's history. As a result, the formation, implementation, and findings of the TRC, the amnesties it offered, and the reparations it paid have led to a new sense of hope and progress in the republic.

South Africa seems on track to solve its outstanding problems, economic disparities, the AIDS epidemic, and social discontent. In forgiving the sins of its past and building for the future of all its people, the country is cautioned as much by George Santayana's iconic "Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it" as by Desmond Tutu's "Was this not a viable way of dealing with conflict? Might those who had been at one another's throats try to live amicably together?"<sup>85</sup> The "stain" that Ingrid de Kok invokes in "Parts of Speech" is also erased: "We all knew the veld/ could raise its angry fur/ but a seasonal fire/ we could, we did, put out."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 319–320.

<sup>85</sup> Tutu, 260. Santayana's "haunting words," Tutu notes, are over the entrance of the museum at Dachau, 20.

<sup>86</sup> "Letter from Childhood," in *Seasonal Fires*, 161.

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## Identity, the “Passing” Novel, and the Phenomenology of “Race”

*Mawuena K. Logan*

The struggles and the “vision of wholeness” according to Ngugi<sup>1</sup> are applicable to and evident in antebellum slave narratives wherein the “slaves wrote themselves into being.” Subsequent narratives by writers of the African Diaspora have continued the tradition of affirming black humanity and freedom in the face of continued dehumanization and what may be termed “internal” colonization. Post-emancipation literature in general, and the “passing novel” in particular—which became popular during the Harlem Renaissance—bear witness to the ways in which artists and intellectuals grappled with the proverbial problem of the color line. While “passing for white” deconstructs arbitrary and absurd racial classifications, it paradoxically and inadvertently gives credibility to the myth of racial purity and fosters historical amnesia, for in the process the passing subjects

<sup>1</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Something Torn and New* (New York: BasicCivitas, 2009), 29.

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not only condone the one-drop rule,<sup>2</sup> they also deny their historicity, ontology, and identities. This chapter argues that this denial of the lived experiences of people of African descent—the phenomenology of “race”/blackness—amounts to a sanitization of history and impedes any “vision of wholeness.” In other words, I contend that it is only by acknowledging the historical, physical, and psychological “dismemberment” of the black body/self could the vision of wholeness be achieved, in that, in spite of their efforts at agency, the “passing” characters in these novels often fail to transcend “race,” as it were, in order to attain the freedom they had hoped for. My primary references are George Schuyler’s satirical novel *Black No More* (1931) and Charles Johnson’s neo-slave narrative *Oxherding Tale* (2005).<sup>3</sup>

When, in the early 1900s, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote that the problem of the twentieth century is that of the “color line,” not many thought we would be mired in the same color line problematic a century later. Today, ethnic conflicts, racism, sexism, and other exclusionary practices across the globe inform us that “race” and its concomitant ramifications are far from being confined to the twentieth century. Because of its concern with the structure and meaning of objects and events in the *lebenswelt*—the world of lived experience—phenomenology serves as a point of departure for my analysis. However, the passing body’s ability to conceal its experiences nuances the phenomenological claim that the body can always provide an unimpeachable and objective knowledge of the world of lived experience.

Our perception of and perspective on the world, and hence knowledge of it, are largely based on the senses, chief among them being vision or sight. When the protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* declares: “I am an invisible man... I am a man of substance... I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me,”<sup>4</sup> he speaks of people’s perception of him, or rather their inability to see him beyond the color of

<sup>2</sup> Determining who is Black in the United States has been quite controversial, but according to F. James Davis it became accepted that “any person with any known African Black ancestry” was considered Black, “meaning a single drop of ‘black blood’ makes a person black” (quoted in *Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition*, 1991), 5.

<sup>3</sup> George Schuyler’s novel, *Black No More* (1931), is a Harlem Renaissance novel that attempts to make “race” irrelevant, while Charles Johnson’s neo-slave narrative, *Oxherding Tale* (2005), ponders, among other things, what it means to be black in the antebellum South: when does “race” matter? The publication dates of these novels show how the question of who is Black has not fully been resolved to this day.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 3.

his skin: his body provides only partial knowledge of him. In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu's (the chief priest's) inability to spot the new moon that would alert him to harvest time and the annual yam festival—a time for the spiritual cleansing of his community—due to his increasing poor sight, not only foreshadows the impending danger that is about to befall him, it also indicates his lack of knowledge or foresight.<sup>5</sup> This connection between sight/perception and knowledge is what Elizabeth Grosz highlights when she argues that in Greek philosophy, knowledge was "generally described in metaphors derived from vision and optics," and was considered superior to other senses.<sup>6</sup> Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty also makes this sight-knowledge connection when he identifies the body as "the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of [one's] comprehension."<sup>7</sup> Phenomenologically speaking, then, the body becomes a socio-historical and cultural template, a canvas, that not only produces knowledge, but also grows into an instrument of knowledge; our identities are thus embedded in the body's temporal and spatial experiences. But this body-sight-knowledge intercorrelation becomes tenuous when the body is capable of concealing its experiences, as in the case of the passing subject, or when it prevents others from looking beyond what it has historically and stereotypically stood for, as in the case of the invisible man of Ellison's novel. My deployment of phenomenology to read Johnson's work is not new; the author himself has acknowledged, in *Being and Race*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's influence on his work, and critics have also employed the theory to critique Johnson's works, albeit differently: Merleau-Ponty's idea of "epoché, the suspension or bracketing of presuppositions in order to perceive freshly."<sup>8</sup> My approach here follows Frantz Fanon's<sup>9</sup> reading of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspective, inserting race, to discuss passing and the passing subject in both Johnson's and Schuyler's works.

<sup>5</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (New York: Penguin Books; Reissue edition, 2016), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 97.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>8</sup> James W. Coleman, "Charles Johnson's Quest for Black Freedom in *Oxherding Tale*," *African American Review* 29: 4 (Winter, 1995), 631.

<sup>9</sup> Frantz Fanon, in his *Black Skin, White Masks*, nuanced, even rejected, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological argument that the subject is a free agent, by arguing that the black subject is not that free under the gaze of his/her white counterpart. (See *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112).

Historically, blackness or the black body has been so discursively and physically “thingified” and denigrated under slavery and colonization that it adopts postures and worldviews that assured the body’s survival, but which are antithetical to self-assertion. As Michel Foucault has persuasively argued, while “[t]he body—and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and, soil—is the domain of the *Herkunft* [origin or source], [n]othing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men.”<sup>10</sup> The passing subject, thus, exemplifies the body’s ability to conceal its “past experience ... desires, failings, and errors.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, because the body is a socio-historical and cultural construct, it has the capacity (no matter how limited that capacity) to destabilize the assumption that identities are fixed or stable, and indicates, rather, that identities are subject and subjected to space and time, and always in the making, and therefore experience based. Foucault, subsequently and indirectly, cautions against the tendency to conceive of the body and its experiences as the sine qua non of knowledge, since experience itself is subjective and time-bound.

The history of the Black Atlantic world is a history of “strife,” as Du Bois puts it, which cannot be wished away or ignored because it has enduring cultural meanings and social consequences. Behind all attempts to pass is always the will to power and freedom, to regain a sense of a self-denied by history. Historian Arthur Schomburg identifies the role of history in the restoration of the self; he wrote: “History must restore what slavery took away, for it is the social damage of slavery that the present generations must repair and offset.”<sup>12</sup> It is, however, unlikely that the history to which Schomburg refers is the master-narrative; rather it is a history that emanates from the historical and literary representations offered by antebellum and postbellum narratives from the perspectives and experiences of the enslaved. As Alysson Parker argues, by “re-examining crucial narratives and stories, be they autobiographical or fictionalized attempts to relate reality, it is necessary to acknowledge every encounter with history as a shaping of the present.”<sup>13</sup> The past, even if ignored by History, does not disappear because it shapes present and future selves.

<sup>10</sup> Hubert Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow, eds. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Hermeneutics and Structuralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 110.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>12</sup> Alain Locke, ed. *The New Negro* (New York: Atheneum, 1925), 231.

<sup>13</sup> Alysson Parker, “‘This narrative is no fiction:’ Mapping Cultural Expressions of Post Traumatic Slave Disorder” (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 2010), 12.

While traditional and neo-slave narratives speak to the experiences of the black body and are crucial to unearthing the rationale behind the act of passing, they also challenge the assumption that the body can reveal, unproblematically, its experiences and history. Our identities or selves—the way we perceive ourselves, and are perceived by others—are historically, culturally, politically, and socially constructed, and therefore performative, to use Judith Butler's terminology. A critique of the lived experience of blackness, nevertheless, points the way towards an understanding of the black body's attempt and ability to conform to, as well as resist, Eurocentric paradigms and epistemologies. In fact, the act of passing in the antebellum and postbellum periods qualifies as an instance of the body's ability to challenge, while paradoxically upholding, oppressive and arbitrary laws, and discriminatory practices. The postbellum era was marked by efforts of both individuals and the African American avant-garde writers to forge and affirm a new identity that culminated in what Alain Locke called the "New Negro," demonstrating that identities are contingent upon historical events and phenomena rather than a fixed-once-and-for-all affair. From Sojourner Truth's narrative we learn that "the freedom of the most free of the colored people in this country is but nominal; but stunted and limited as it is, at best, it is an immense remove from chattel slavery."<sup>14</sup> Arguably, the atrocities against the ex-slave, in the form of lynchings and the enactment of other Jim Crow laws in the aftermath of chattel slavery, are based on the dominant society's refusal and unwillingness to accord the ex-slave this "limited" freedom and to embrace the fact that identities and/or social status of the newly freed are a matter of history and not of genetics or nature.

Phenomenology is usually associated with Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but recent scholars including Frantz Fanon and Jean Paul Sartre have endeavored to nuance the universalist approaches and perspectives of their predecessors by positing the racialized body's inability to be a free agent that can fully participate in its own identity construction. In reference to Fanon's chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man,"<sup>15</sup> Jeremy Weate argues that "[i]n the interracial encounter, the White is able to participate in the schematization of the world, while the Black may not, for his skin difference

<sup>14</sup> Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997), 39.

<sup>15</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 82–108.

closes down the possibility of free agency.”<sup>16</sup> Injecting “race” into the equation exposes the body’s limitations and establishes a better relationship among the body, experience, and identity, and accounts for the individual’s choices, fears, and aspirations. Consequently, visible racial difference condemns *à priori* racialized individuals to invisibility and otherness, and determines the choices available to the black self/body. In most cases, while the individual’s choices are limited, and therefore understandable as a result of their historical situatedness, the passing subjects negate, albeit inadvertently, their selves and identities. Cheryl Wall, in discussing Nella Larsen’s passing novels, asserts: “The tragedy for these mulattoes is the impossibility of self-definition. Larsen’s protagonists assume false identities that ensure social survival but result in psychological suicide.”<sup>17</sup> Andrew Hawkins’ words in *Oxherding Tale* tell the same story: it is a “no-win struggle for happiness.”<sup>18</sup>

Passing, as a practice and a discursive activity, interrogates the assumed fixity, normativity, and essentialist approaches to “race” and identity. The discourse of racial passing itself partly implies, connotes, or assumes dishonesty, trespassing, masking, and deviousness; both the practice and the narratives of passing question the legitimacy of and rationale for fixed racial classifications and categories, and “forces reconsideration of the cultural logic that the physical body is the site of identic intelligibility.”<sup>19</sup> As Elaine Ginsberg argues, “critical to the process and discourse of ‘passing’ in American history and in the American cultural imaginary are the status and privileges associated with being white and being male,”<sup>20</sup> because “had emancipation brought full social and legal equality, the story of race passing might have ended in the 1860s. But in the aftermath of the Civil War, legal as well as cultural barriers were erected to full citizenship for persons defined as ‘Negro.’”<sup>21</sup> The unfinished business of “social and legal equality” becomes a major focus of the Harlem Renaissance novel, *Black No More*, as the narrator informs us that Dr. Crookman’s invention “was

<sup>16</sup> Robert Bernasconi, ed. *Race* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc. 2001), 171.

<sup>17</sup> Cheryl Wall, “Passing for what? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen’s Novels.” *Black American Literature Forum* 20:1/2 (Spring-Summer 1986), 98.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Johnson, *Oxherding Tale* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 70.

<sup>19</sup> Elaine K. Ginsberg, ed. *Passing and The Fictions of Identity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

to succeed where the Civil War had failed.”<sup>22</sup> In *Oxherding Tale* it becomes evident early in the narrative that physical freedom is what Andrew, the protagonist, desires most in his efforts to pass—freedom which history and the socio-historical construction of “race” have denied him. In George Schuyler’s *Black No More*, Max Disher’s ultimate objective in undergoing Dr. Crookman’s treatment/procedure that turns Blacks into Whites is freedom—to be what and whomever he wants to be.

### OXHERDING TALE

Charles Johnson’s *Oxherding Tale*<sup>23</sup> is a neo-slave narrative set in the antebellum South, on Jonathan Polkinghorne’s plantation called Cripplegate, and details the adventures of Andrew Hawkins, born of a white mother (Jonathan’s wife) and a black father, George Hawkins, (Jonathan’s butler). After a night of heavy drinking both slave master and his butler become too drunk to face their respective wives and decide to swap marital beds; the result is Andrew. At 20, Andrew, who falls in love with another slave at Cripplegate, Minty, requests to be manumitted, so he could work and purchase his and Minty’s freedom. Jonathan, who has hitherto hired a private tutor for Andrew’s formal education in philosophy and other classics, instead, sends him to Flo Hartfield’s plantation, Leviathan, to work and earn money for his freedom. While at Leviathan where he becomes Flo’s sex toy, and is later sentenced to the mines where slaves are worked to death, Andrew decides to run away with the aid of another slave, a coffin-maker, named Reb. Andrew passes for white, and later marries Peggy, a white woman, but he lives most of his life in fear of being “discovered” by the renowned slave catcher, Horace Bannon. Before Andrew is sent to Flo Hartfield’s plantation, his father, George Hawkins, warns him against passing: “You could pass...if you wanted to, but if you did it’d be like turnin’ your back on me and everythin’ I believes in.”<sup>24</sup> Andrew would later defy his father, as he passes for white, because as Reb tells him, “if you got no power you have to think like people who *do* so you kin make y’self over into what they want.”<sup>25</sup> Interestingly enough, the Vet (yes, the Vet) who examines Andrew at Leviathan observes that his

<sup>22</sup> George Schuyler, *Black No More* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2011), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Johnson, *Oxherding Tale* (New York: Scribner, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

heart, since his arrival, “had developed an extra sound: a sort of whisper, or moan on the diastolic downbeat,” and that his heart “would never rest again, ‘unless [he] stops being a Negro.’”<sup>26</sup> Andrew finds the Vet’s recommendation ridiculous but wonders if his “life would indeed be easier if he abandoned what appears to be a no-win struggle for happiness in the Black World...that had always been, and might ever be a slaughterhouse—a style of being characterized by stasis, denial, humiliation, thinghood... a relative being.”<sup>27</sup> Andrew, in fact, stops being a Negro, as he passes for white, and is “pleased that [his] passage into the White World went unmarked,” because the Negro, according to Reb, “is the finest student of the White World, the one pupil in the classroom who watches himself watching the others, absorbing the habits and body language of his teachers, his fellow students.”<sup>28</sup> However, in spite of his success in the white world, his racial past, so to speak, catches up with him when he sees Minty (the woman he had promised to marry once he is financially secure to buy their freedom) being sold on the auction block. He is moved to attend to her physical wounds, resulting from abuse and neglect, in order to free himself, and to effectively leave slavery behind.

In a sense Andrew has to deal with the haunting past and trauma, metaphorically represented in the novel by Minty’s physical and psychological wounds, which, notwithstanding that he is a fugitive, prevent him from achieving or experiencing full freedom. When he buys Minty and takes her home, he tells Peggy, his wife: “I am *indebted* [sic] to her [Minty] ... there are duties I must discharge, if I am to be free.”<sup>29</sup> Given that most people in contemporary society did not experience chattel slavery first hand, it would be unfair to adjudicate on the actions of slaves whose lives were in the balance, but Andrew’s story of “successful” passing and his indebtedness to Minty in the above quote raises some ontological and epistemological questions. What do freedom and existence mean in the context of slavery? What does George, Andrew’s father, intend to convey when he tells his son that passing would be “like turnin’ your back on me and everythin’ I believes in”? Ontology is predicated on physical freedom, among other things, but the freedom that Andrew now refers to and seeks has to do with the “wholeness” in my epigraph; acknowledging his debt

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Johnson, *Oxherding Tale* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 161.

to Minty who has also suffered the traumatic experiences of slavery, arguably, partially achieves that end. In Sigmund Freud's later psychoanalytical work he redefined trauma, not as a physical wound but a psychological one. Studies on the Holocaust and New World chattel slavery, and postcolonial studies reveal the enduring legacy of traumatic events and the role of memory in the healing process.

Generally speaking, in many cultures, burial and mourning rituals and ceremonies are not meant for the dead per se, but for the living to make peace with the trauma of losing a loved one or object: mourning is an acceptance of a loss. In his *Something Torn and New*,<sup>30</sup> Ngugi, drawing on the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, suggests that the acknowledgment of trauma and its recollection are a necessary phase in healing the trauma victim. The connection among memory (of trauma), race, and racial identity/solidarity is not an obvious one, to say the least, because "slavery and colonialism have become events of shame, of guilt ... shut up in a crypt, a collective psychic tomb."<sup>31</sup> Many in Andrew's predicament would have perused any tool at their disposal (including passing for white) to break the chains of their enslavement, but the reader should be mindful of George's take on passing, and of Andrew's own "debt to Minty." Critical race theorists, not unlike George, would argue that by passing Andrew validates the system he attempts to undermine. While the narrative remains ambiguous about this quandary, Andrew thinks his father

would reject me, claiming I had rejected him, and this was partly true: I rejected (in George) the *need* to be an Untouchable .... My father kept the pain alive. He needed to rekindle racial horrors, revive old pains, review disappointments like a sick man fingering his sores. Like my tutor [Ezekiel Sykes-Withers], he *chose* [emphasis added] misery. Grief was the grillwork—the emotional grid—through which George Hawkins sifted and sorted events, simplified a world so overrich in sense it outstripped him, and all that was necessary to break this spell of hatred, this self-inflicted segregation from the Whole, was to acknowledge, once and for all, that what he allowed to be determinant for his life depended on himself and no one else.<sup>32</sup>

That Andrew chooses to go against his father's wishes and pass for white is not lost on the reader, but we are also reminded that he will not be free

<sup>30</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Johnson, *Oxherding Tale* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 142.

until he pays his “debt” to Minty. Does passing necessarily entail a rejection of the self, one’s identity, or a father figure, as in Andrew’s case? What does this identity consist of? If identities are not fixed but performative and historically constituted, as I have argued earlier and as Andrew has demonstrated in this narrative through passing, the act of passing, which leads to freedom, could not be frowned upon. It is arguable that while George didn’t choose misery (he was in misery: slavery was misery), the need to “rekindle racial horrors, revive old pains, review disappointments”<sup>33</sup> may be psychically and psychologically crippling. Herein lies the paradox I have been examining: Andrew’s body is able to conceal his slave past and identity, which if revealed, would result in his re-enslavement, but which, concealed paradoxically leaves him psychologically crippled until his acknowledgment of that inglorious past.

### BLACK NO MORE

Published in 1923, George Schuyler’s Harlem Renaissance satirical novel, partly science fiction, tells of one man’s crusade to address the racial conundrum once and for all by inventing a procedure that literally transforms Blacks into Whites, making “race” or color irrelevant and absurd. After three years of study and research in Germany, Dr. Junius Crookman returns home, to the United States, with his discovery that “can change Black to White in three days.”<sup>34</sup> It is also a tale of the adventures of Max Disher, an insurance agent, Dr. Crookman’s first client, for whom this scientific breakthrough could not have come at a better time. Dr. Crookman’s invention is in the news, carried by *Times* newspaper, just a day after a white woman, Helen, at a club in Harlem, turns down his request for a dance, claiming she doesn’t dance with Negroes. Even though Max is skeptical about this new discovery, he muses: “No more jim crow. No more insults. As a white man he could go anywhere, be anything he wanted to be, do most anything he wanted to do, be a free man at last ... and probably be able to meet the girl from Atlanta. What a vision!”<sup>35</sup> Dr. Crookman’s procedure is arguably an extreme, “secure” and definitive form of passing, for the passing subject is not likely to be detected, at least not initially. The subject crosses the color line for good, but their offspring could bear the physical features and characteristics of a Black/Negro person.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Johnson, *Oxherding Tale* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

It is noteworthy that in his controversial essay, "The Negro-Art Hokum," Schuyler has argued that to suggest the existence of black art in the United States is "self-evident foolishness," since according to him, "the Aframerican is merely a lampblack Anglo-Saxon" who has been "subjected to what the uplifters call Americanism for the past three hundred years."<sup>36</sup> *Black No More*, according to Rita Keresztesi, is best read as a "companion piece"<sup>37</sup> to "The Negro-Art Hokum," in which the author attempts to dismiss "race" as a factor in artistic production. When Schuyler's article first appeared in *The Nation* in June 1926, the editors invited a rebuttal from Langston Hughes who wrote "The Negro Art and the Racial Mountain," highlighting the importance of "race" in all African American artistic endeavors. As a companion piece to Schuyler's provocative essay, *Black No More* deemphasizes "race" and black culture and, to some extent, history, for as far as he was concerned Africans Americans are not culturally any different from their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. Dr. Crookman explains to Henry Johnson, his right man: "there are plenty of Caucasians who have lips quite as thick and noses quite as broad as any of us ... Some Negroes like the Somalis, Fulanis, Egyptians, Hausas and Abyssinians have very thin lips and nostrils."<sup>38</sup>

In accordance with Schuyler's satirical bent and his questioning of "race," Dr. Crookman's procedure creates a new class of Whites, New Negroes or White Negroes, who phenotypically look even lighter than the Anglo-Saxon, thus complicating "race," as well as the social, political, and existential consequences of racial classification. It happens that in the process, those thought previously to have no Negro ancestry are actually Black, according to the one-drop rule, and subject to victimization. Dr. Crookman's invention, which at first seems to solve the perennial question of the color line, not through any political action or socio-cultural approach, has now created new problems of color awareness/consciousness: White Negroes become a distinct group to persecute. Hence the color line has been redefined and redrawn, but it does not disappear, possibly a suggestion that "race" is not only socially constructed, but real, insurmountable, and serves scapegoating purposes.

<sup>36</sup> George Schuyler, "The Negro Art-Hokum." *The Harlem Renaissance Reader*, edited by David Levering Lewis (New York: Penguin Classics, 1995), 97.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Soto, ed. *Teaching the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Peter Lang 2008), 181.

<sup>38</sup> George Schuyler, *Black No More* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2011), 11.

In the meantime, Max Disher, turned Matthew Fisher, doesn't find life as a white man to be "the rosy existence he anticipated. He was forced to conclude that it was pretty dull and that he was bored. As a boy, he had been taught to look up to white folks as just little less than gods; now he found them little different from the Negroes, except that they were uniformly less courteous and less interesting."<sup>39</sup> *Black No More*, like the traditional passing novel, exemplifies as well as deconstructs the arbitrariness and the absurdity of racial classifications in many ways. As a white man Matthew finally meets, after a long search, and marries Helen, the "girl from Atlanta" who has no idea he is an "ex-Negro," as he calls himself. Matthew also learns that being an ex-Negro wears on his nerves, not unlike the anxiety the passing subject, Andrew, experiences in *Oxherding Tale*, for fear of being discovered or exposed. Conflicted thus, a "slight feeling of regret that he had left his people forever would cross his mind, but it fled before the painful memories of past experiences in this, his home town."<sup>40</sup> More importantly, he wonders if this is all worth it. When his wife, Helen, becomes pregnant, he devises a scheme to burn down the house so that she, under stress, would miscarry, foreboding she would give birth to a "brown" baby, thus revealing his "black" ancestry. Dr. Crookman's business, "Black-No-More Incorporated," comes under attack as it puts white supremacists out of business, for Negroes disappear and join the white "race." To wit, Matthew now works for the Knights of Nordica, a white supremacist group, where he meets and marries Helen, the Imperial Grand Wizzard's daughter. Matthew is able to take advantage of the working-class whites, who instead of agitating for better wages, fall for Matthew's plot to incite a perceived race war. A witch-hunt to find and lynch "white Negroes" or anyone with a black ancestry (visible or not) ensues, and it also turns out that Mr. Henry Givens, Helen's father, is of Negro parentage and has to flee New York; but before he could get away he is apprehended and lynched by white separatist church members.

Schuyler's novel has been called *roman-à-clef*, among other things, and his satirical approach to addressing "race" makes "black" and "white" designations devoid of a fixed meaning—a "floating signifier." The novel also complicates what it means to be Black, a question whose answer still remains elusive today, and questions the so-called racial purity, while it reinforces it at the same time. Dr. Crookman's invention, while allowing

<sup>39</sup> George Schuyler, *Black No More* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2011), 34.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–35.

Blacks to live a normal life without the problematics of "race," reaffirms the master-narrative that "white is right." It also erases the diversity that is America and obliterates the contributions of people of African descent to the nation. As Toni Morrison aptly puts it in *Playing in the Dark*, "the slave population, it could be and was assumed, offered itself up as surrogate selves for mediation on problems of human freedom, its lure and its elusiveness."<sup>41</sup> The fact that Dr. Crookman's treatment doesn't prevent society from identifying individuals as "White Negroes" attests to how complicated, arbitrary, socially constructed, and yet ubiquitous and real "race" is. The reality of "White Negroes" also signals the fact of "Negro Whites," as evidenced in Rev. Givens who, upon realization that he has Negro blood, proclaims: "I guess we're all niggers now."<sup>42</sup> Helen Givens, who "never dance[s] with niggers" at the beginning of the novel, now sings a different tune when her own father is shown to have black ancestry, and when her "White Negro" husband, Matthew, confesses to his own passing,

[S]he felt proud of her Matthew. She loved him more than ever. They had money and a beautiful, brown baby. What more did they need? To hell with the world! To hell with society! Compared to what she possessed, thought Helen, all talk of race and color was dammed foolishness.<sup>43</sup>

Helen's comments are in line with Schuyler's argument that "race" is nothing but a discriminatory tool in a capitalistic society, a Marxist interpretation that runs through this novel. Whiteness (not color) has been emptied of its assumed positive signification, and since being "too white" indicates Negro ancestry, many now resort to darkening their skin in the sun and tanning salons to distinguish themselves from the "White Negroes," who are singled out, again, for discrimination: visible blackness has turned into invisible blackness, but blackness all the same. As Jane Kuenz points out, "while Schuyler's novel seems to erase race by redefining it as a version of class, it ends up only highlighting the nonidentity of those terms: in the world of *Black No More*, 'blackness' can always reemerge within class in the form of a threat of alienated labor or as the comforts unavailable in this alienated world."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 37.

<sup>42</sup> George Schuyler, *Black No More* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2011), 129.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Jane Kuenz, "American Racial Discourse, 1900–1930: Schuyler's *Black No More*." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 30: 2 (Winter, 1997), 188.

Without jettisoning the reality of living in a Jim Crow world, which undermines his humanity, negates his existence, and restricts his movements, Matthew's admission to his wife that he is of Negro ancestry is important for our discussion in that, it reflects, metaphorically, an acceptance of a self that he's left behind for "legitimate" reasons. Since the master narrative delinks blackness from freedom, humanity, and equality, these passing characters insert their own trickster-narratives or "mini-narratives" to assert their humanity—a theme that is ubiquitous in most, if not all, literatures of the Black Atlantic. These narratives, as argued earlier, deconstruct as well as reinforce social constructions of "race" and subjectivity, as they reflect on the burdens of "race." Matthew couldn't go on murdering his own children when the doctor suggests they kill the baby who looks "very, very dark." Matthew's anxiety, while he awaits the birth of his baby, becomes unbearable as he muses: "Must he go on forever in this way? ... Wouldn't it be better to settle the matter once and for all? An angel of frankness beckoned him to be done with this life of pretense."<sup>45</sup> It is only after admitting to Helen that he is responsible for the brown baby that he feels a "great load lifting from his soul. Then for a few minutes he poured out the secret to the astonished little audience."<sup>46</sup> The self-denial that accompanies his passage into the white world, which he finds "dull" and confining, is an assault on his sense of self, which only a confession, and hence a self-acceptance could cure. By reclaiming that self, both Andrew and Matthew are able to free themselves and break out of the "generational psychic and collective crypt" to which Ngugi alludes.

Both *Oxherding Tale* and *Black No More* reveal that the phenomenology of "race"—the lived experience of "race"—compels Andrew, Max, and other characters to pass in order to circumvent their subjected positions. For them, blackness is a badge of infamy, an impediment that stands between them and freedom, and therefore a liability at best, and a rejection of that identity is a no-brainer. However, in Andrew's case, he has to revisit the past he tries to shun in the antebellum South in the form of Minty; in Schuyler's novel, Max is conflicted and has to reveal his ancestral background in order to "de-burden" himself. These narratives seem to ponder basic ontological and phenomenological questions still relevant in contemporary Black Atlantic world, among them: how one's identity, ancestry, and "race" determine whether one is free or enslaved, lives or

<sup>45</sup> George Schuyler, *Black No More* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2011), 126.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 129.

dies. In the 1806 *Hudgins v. Wright* case in Virginia, the freedom of the Wrights women, who claimed Indian ancestry, was decided on "the complexion of their face, the texture of their hair, and the width of their nose. Each of these characteristics served to mark their race, and their race in the end determined whether they were free or enslaved."<sup>47</sup> Put differently, as Du Bois does in *The Souls of Black Folk*, "[t]he American Negro ... simply wishes [America] to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face."<sup>48</sup>

While my chapter focuses primarily on the acknowledgment of psychic trauma associated with historical events and on spiritual freedom, my intention is not to overlook or undermine the materiality of suffering/oppression. As Fanon opines, "[t]here will be an authentic disalienation only to the degree to which things, in the most materialistic meaning of the word, will have been restored to their proper places."<sup>49</sup> In fact Schuyler's novel emphasizes this connection by showing how "race" takes a back seat to the economic havoc created by Dr. Crookman's invention. To wit, it was these economic motives that occasioned the Atlantic slave trade in the first place, and as Stef Craps and Gert Buelens argue, an over-emphasis on "[i]mmaterial recovery-psychological healing" undermines material recovery—"reparation or restitution and, more broadly, the transformation of a wounding political, social, and economic system."<sup>50</sup> In the words of Ron Eyerman, "[i]t wasn't so much the direct experience of slavery that would prove traumatic, but its aftermath as the hope and promise of equality and acceptance were crushed finally and formally in the 1880–90s."<sup>51</sup> To deal with this "trauma of rejection," he argues, "the memory of slavery would prove an important resource."<sup>52</sup> It is, therefore, by acknowledging the significance of the material, historical, physical, and psychological "dismemberment" of the black body/self that a vision of wholeness could be achieved.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Haney Lopez, "The Social Construction of Race." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2nd edition. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds. (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, Second edition, 2004), 965.

<sup>48</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 11–12.

<sup>50</sup> Stef Craps & Gert Buelens, "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels." *Studies in the Novel* 40:1/2 (Spring & Summer, 2008), 5.

<sup>51</sup> Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 39.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

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## SECTION II

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# Encounters: Spaces of Subjugation and Dominance



## Precolonial Imaginaries and Colonial Legacies in Mobutu's "Authentic" Zaïre

*Daviel Lazure Vieira*

Walking from the Place Royale on rue de la Régence in Brussels, one cannot escape the view of the Palais de Justice, located in the opposite direction with the *ville basse* at its feet. Beyond the peristyle of the main entrance, there is the colossal *salle des pas-perdus* underneath the dome, supported by four pillars more than 40 meters high, with grandiose staircases and seemingly endless rows of galleries. Designed by architect Joseph Poelaert in 1861 and completed in 1883, the Law Courts of Brussels is a striking example of nineteenth-century monumentalism—one that was mired in controversy. Chief engineer Clément Labye criticized the “particular measures” surrounding the adoption of the final blueprint and the choice of Poelaert, an architect whose propensity to excess was also reflected in his inability to provide accurate estimates. The building, commissioned by Léopold I and unveiled by his successor Léopold II, had to reflect Belgium’s peculiar history and its newly found “national distinctiveness,” as Silverman notes:

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The attempts to characterize the *Palais* by its contemporaries revealed how it lay outside the canon of traditional forms of European eclecticism and its inventory of historicist associations. Here style reverted to a pre-history or primal periods in a distant past, appropriate to the Belgians' search for architectural types untainted by the evocation of French, Austrian, Spanish, or Dutch legacies, all linked to rulers and conquerors before Belgium's emergence as a sovereign power in 1830–31.<sup>1</sup>

It was the concrete illustration of a larger attempt to define Belgian identity in spite of the heterogeneity of this small country divided along linguistic lines between Flemish and Walloon peoples, later accompanied by a reform of the legal system in the early 1890s aimed at “knitting together a myriad of local, communal, regional, and municipal particularisms and precedents into a workable central structure.”<sup>2</sup> Belgium's quest for expansion outside Europe, and in particular, the King's sole proprietorship of a territory about 76 times the size of his dominion—the Congo Free State—was another expression of Léopold II's efforts to cement his reputation and solidify his rule. A typical exercise in nation-state building, it was supported by a propaganda machine at home that took the form of monuments, expositions, museums, and public education initiatives that successfully convinced the Belgians of their renewed sense of purpose.

The Congo Free State was an obstinate and bloody business, and international pressures against the numerous abuses committed by the King's gendarmerie, the *Force publique*, eventually forced Léopold II to relinquish his forceful grip. The colony came under direct state rule in 1908 and was known as the “Belgian Congo” until the proclamation of its independence in 1960. The end of Belgium's imperial adventure in the Congo in the wake of the struggle for self-determination on the part of the colonized—an impulse that swept the whole African continent in the aftermath of the Second World War—was both hastily prepared and reluctantly executed, to say the least. Whereas a few months earlier the Belgians had envisaged a long path toward independence for the Congolese, the roadmap to freedom was drastically curtailed following riots in Léopoldville in 1959. Shortly after the first democratically elected prime minister Patrice Lumumba assumed power on 30 June 1960, he dismissed Belgian officers

<sup>1</sup> Debora Silverman, “‘*Modernité sans frontières*’: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of the Avant-Garde in King Leopold's Belgium, 1885–1910,” *American Imago* Vol. 68, N°4 (Winter 2011): 717.

<sup>2</sup> Silverman, “*Modernité sans frontières*,” 718.

from the *Force publique* who refused the change in command, and replaced the gendarmerie with the *Armée nationale congolaise* (ANC) under an African leadership. The resulting outbreak of violence prompted a Belgian intervention on the pretext of protecting its nationals, and troops remained on the ground in defiance of UN resolutions demanding their removal. The crisis put to the test the feverish, newly independent state of Congo-Léopoldville: Not only was Lumumba faced with calls for secession from the provinces of Katanga and South Kasai in July and August 1960 (supported by Belgium), he also became entangled in Cold War calculations that hastened his demise. The careful interplay between the American and Soviet rhetorics of an increasingly bipolar world, in every sense of the word, had been upset and ultimately cost him his life. After staging a first coup on 14 September 1960, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, Lumumba's former secretary and the ANC's chief of staff, seized power in November 1965. On 17 April 1967 Mobutu's party, the *Mouvement populaire de la révolution* (MPR), was created.<sup>3</sup>

A little less than a century after Léopold II's bid for "national distinctiveness" in his construction of the Belgian body politic thus began the process of decolonization in the former colony and the establishment of a sovereign Congo. In the era of the nation-state, the only model deemed legitimate by the international system, the right to self-determination necessarily entailed the reconceptualization of African societies in light of this paradigm shift. It is in this context that Mobutu provided a supply of ideas informed by precolonial times and African traditions by appealing to a doctrine named *recours à l'authenticité*, "recourse to authenticity"—an attempt to discard or efface the colonial legacy and reconcile these ideas of the past with the modernity of his era. Congo was turned into Zaïre, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu became Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, streets and monuments were stripped of their imperial attributes and carried "Zaïrian-sounding" names, à *résonnance zaïroise*, starting

<sup>3</sup>This abridged account of the transition from the "Belgian Congo" to the establishment of Mobutu's Second Republic owes much to the work of Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, who provides a detailed and exhaustive overview of this troubled period in the Congo's history. In particular, see *Sixième partie: Vers le Congo contemporain*, Chapitre 2, "Dans la mouvance de l'indépendance," *Septième partie: Le Congo contemporain*, Chapitre 1, "L'essor" and Chapitre 2, "L'invention de la société congolaise contemporaine," in Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, *Histoire générale du Congo. De l'héritage ancien à la République démocratique* (Brussels: Duculot, 1998), 521–804.

1 January 1972.<sup>4</sup> *Authenticité* was meant as a reaction against colonialism that reaffirmed the nation's "African" or "Zairian" character. In the words of Pauwels and Pintens, it constituted "less a step backward [*retour en arrière*], a return to historical values, than a rise in consciousness [*prise de conscience*] with respect to the African Zairian's proper being, who realizes that he wishes to think and act from his own standpoint, while doing away with the conventions, values, opinions and prejudices imposed upon him by colonization."<sup>5</sup>

The novelty of *authenticité* lies less in its insistence that Africans should liberate themselves through a *prise de conscience* rather than a strict *retour en arrière*, as other movements like *négritude* already advocated, but in the totality of its application to all fields that govern life, from law to politics, from economics to culture. In Mobutu's view, *authenticité* was an all-encompassing "African philosophy," even though it appeared to many as the mere instrument of legitimization of his political program—and a particularly brutal one at that. It is little surprising that current scholarship is often consistent with this approach, with historians, anthropologists, and political scientists treating *authenticité* either as a fetish, by examining the history of the Mobutist state through cultural expressions that reflected this strange "philosophical" anomaly, or as a hollow concept, a piece of propaganda—which it *also* partly was. It seems necessary, however, to take *authenticité* at face value in order to confront its claims, namely that it represented a departure from the ferocity of the colonial experience and provided a cohesive and comprehensive value system (cultural, political, legal, and economic) to harmonize the past with the present. On both accounts, the success of *authenticité* is debatable, not least because the language it spoke was not exactly the most "authentic"—nor truly "new" for that matter—but also because its archetypes reproduced the colonial violence it insisted on refuting. These tropes were neither the end nor the beginning of something but the extension of history itself, with its inescapable colonial past. Such an encounter with *authenticité*, according to

<sup>4</sup>Johan M. Pauwels and Walter Pintens, *La législation zaïroise relative au nom. Droit et authenticité africaine* (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen/Académie royale des sciences d'outre-mer, 1983), 10.

<sup>5</sup>All translations from the French are mine unless otherwise noted. Wherever useful, I have included the original French in the notes for reference. "...moins un retour en arrière, vers des valeurs historiques, qu'une prise de conscience de l'être propre de l'Africain zaïrois, qui se rend compte qu'il veut réfléchir et surtout agir au départ d'un point de vue propre, en délaissant les usages, les valeurs, les opinions et les préjugés qui lui avaient été imposés par la colonisation." Pauwels and Pintens, *La législation zaïroise relative au nom*, 11.

its own terms, may allow us to mediate these different perspectives found in Congolese/Zairian historiography with regard to Mobutu's legacy and reveal patterns of subjugation that never ceased to exist.

Examining the president's speeches, interviews, and memorandums, I first assess the level of authenticity of *authenticité* itself, exposing its motives as well as its inconsistencies. If *authenticité's* kinship to the colonial precedent is clearly apparent in words, it is too in practice. These words become an essential component of the state apparatus, as I demonstrate in the second part: the rhetoric is employed to justify Zaïre's cultural, political, legal, and economic program, and in all cases parallels can be drawn with the colonial period and Belgium's own peculiar history. This "postcolonial potentate," to borrow Mbembe's expression,<sup>6</sup> may have been imbued by its precolonial and colonial antecedents—having internalized elements of both—but this did not necessarily mean Zairians responded passively to the reappropriation of their African heritage and its perversion by the Mobutist regime. I conclude by suggesting some authentic features of Congolese society, such as the notion of *kindoki*, can be interpreted as forms of resistance against oppression, be it framed in colonial terms or disguised as a liberating vernacular.

### L'ÉTAT, C'EST NOUS: *AUTHENTICITÉ* ACCORDING TO ITSELF

Six years after establishing the Second Republic in 1965, Mobutu explained the tenets of *authenticité* in the following terms before the Congrès national de l'Union progressiste sénégalaise in Dakar, on 14 February 1971:

The meaning of our search, the meaning of our efforts, the meaning of our pilgrimage on this African land, is that we are searching for our authenticity and we shall find it because we want to discover it, and every day more so, from every fiber of our profound being. All told, we, Zairians, want to be authentic Zairians.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 42–44.

<sup>7</sup> "Tout le sens de notre quête, tout le sens de notre effort, tout le sens de notre pèlerinage sur cette terre d'Afrique, c'est que nous sommes à la recherche de notre authenticité et que nous la trouverons parce que nous voulons, par chacune des fibres de notre être profond, la découvrir, et la découvrir chaque jour davantage. En un mot, nous voulons, nous autres Zaïrois, être des Zaïrois authentiques." Mobutu Sese Seko cited in Kangafu-Vingi-Gudumbagana, "Allocution du Commissaire politique, Secrétaire général à la formation des cadres, le citoyen Kangafu-Vingi-Gudumbagana," in *Authenticité et développement: Actes du Colloque national sur l'authenticité*, eds. Union des écrivains zaïrois (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1982), 46.

Before being conceived as a totalizing structure articulated by the state as a “political philosophy,” Mobutu’s *authenticité* was to be understood as a principle that withstood the test of time, a *drive* rather than a mere ensemble of customs, beliefs, and traditions—something that *was*, that *is*, that *forever will be*, something that could be taken away but that nevertheless persisted, regardless of political regimes or social identities. According to Kangafu-Kutumbagana, the party’s main theorist, it is “not a dogma or a religion, but a manner of action designed to serve the nation and its citizens,” whose purpose is to “[lead] away from borrowed ideas and aspirations toward an increased consciousness of indigenous cultural values.”<sup>8</sup> When he addressed the UN General Assembly two years later on 4 October 1973, Mobutu echoed this description of *authenticité* by associating the colonial period with the beginning of a “dehumanization process” [*processus de déshumanisation*] through occupation and subjugation that stripped the colonized of this *drive*, stating: “The black man must abandon his personality, his mental and social structures, in a word, his authenticity.”<sup>9</sup> The search for *authenticité* was thus the search for this personality, these mental and social structures that had disappeared with the colonial encounter. As White aptly demonstrates, such portrayal of *authenticité* as a leitmotiv placed *above* the means of governance “evokes the Western notion of an essential self that is, in some sense, contaminated by the contact with other cultures.”<sup>10</sup> The main objective of the postcolonial subject was therefore to retrieve his *authenticité* [*retrouver son authenticité*], and Mobutu’s project was to translate this concept into a practical framework. The politicization of *authenticité*, the defining of its terms within the realm of the state apparatus, appeared as a mere corollary of the adoption of the nation-state as the *de facto* model of the postwar international system; if the measure of legitimacy of the postcolonial subject’s claims to freedom was the establishment of a sovereign state, the search for *authenticité* was therefore inextricably linked to the fostering of a distinct national identity and the achievement of statehood.<sup>11</sup> Mobutu made explicit the relationship between *authenticité*

<sup>8</sup> Kangafu-Kutumbagana cited in Kenneth Lee Adelman, “The Recourse to Authenticity and Négritude in Zaïre,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 13, N°1 (March 1975): 134.

<sup>9</sup> “Le noir doit abandonner sa personnalité, ses structures mentales et sociales, en un mot, son authenticité.” Mobutu Sese Seko, “Address to the UN General Assembly” (speech, New York, NY, 4 October 1973).

<sup>10</sup> Bob W. White, “L’incroyable machine d’authenticité: l’animation politique et l’usage public de la culture dans le Zaïre de Mobutu,” *Anthropologie et Sociétés* Vol. 30, N°2 (2006): 50.

<sup>11</sup> The inescapability of the nation-state model as a condition for freedom in the postwar era is acutely described by Schatzberg: “Since the imposition of the grid-like structure of the

and nationalism in his 14 February 1971 speech, stating: "Based on our experience, we articulated a doctrine, a doctrine which had to respond to our desire for authenticity; we have adopted authentic Zaïrian nationalism."<sup>12</sup> This political reinterpretation of *authenticité*, that is to say Zaïrian nationalism, was also referred to as "Mobutism" by the president himself, and was adopted as the official ideology of the MPR in 1974.<sup>13</sup>

Although Mobutu situated *authenticité* within the intellectual landscape of the 1950s and 1960s, in line with other movements such as Senghor's and Césaire's *négritude*, he also established a clear distinction between his doctrine and their work. In an address given during the *Culture et développement* symposium to mark Senghor's 70th anniversary in Dakar on 8 October 1976, Mobutu explained the difference between *négritude* and *authenticité* by stating that "the proponents of *négritude* reacted in France against the cultural Western environment of the middle of the 20th century," whereas "we are, first and foremost, reacting against ourselves in Zaïre, and then against the multiplicity of recolonization attempts in all forms," before concluding that "for them, words precede deeds; for us, deeds precede words." [*Chez eux, le verbe passe avant l'action; chez nous, l'action passe avant le verbe.*]<sup>14</sup> Implicit in this assessment is an understanding of *négritude* as essentially an intellectual discourse rather

contemporary international system of states, Zaïre and other states in Africa are no longer faced with a choice between adaptation and extinction. They will continue to exist as territorial units whether or not they change with the times. Consider this counterfactual proposition. Had the Zaïrian state existed prior to colonial rule, it probably would not have lasted as long as it has because precolonial states did not have the international system to provide ready made legitimacy in the form of international recognition of preset territorial boundaries." Michael G. Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression in Zaïre* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 139.

<sup>12</sup> "À partir de notre expérience, nous avons mûri une doctrine, une doctrine qui devait répondre à notre souci d'authenticité; nous avons adopté le nationalisme zaïrois authentique." Mobutu Sese Seko cited in Kangafu-Vingi-Gudumbagana, "Allocution," 46.

<sup>13</sup> Mobutu Sese Seko, *Mobut: Dignité pour l'Afrique. Entretiens avec Jean-Louis Remilleux* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1989), 99. See also Thomas M. Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle: Zaïre in Comparative Perspective* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 305.

<sup>14</sup> "Les chants de la négritude réagissaient en France contre l'environnement culturel occidental du milieu de ce XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.... Tandis que nous, nous réagissons au Zaïre contre nous-mêmes d'abord, ensuite contre les multiples tentatives de recolonisation sous toutes ses formes.... Chez eux, le verbe passe avant l'action; chez nous, l'action passe avant le verbe." Mobutu Sese Seko, "Message à l'occasion du colloque 'Culture et développement' organisé à Dakar dans le cadre du soixante-dixième anniversaire du Président de la République du Sénégal, M. Léopold-Sédar Senghor (8 octobre 1976)," in *Discours, allocutions et messages*, 67.

than an applicable governing structure, and the suggestion that the former is concerned with reforming the racist, superior European responsible for the horrors of colonialism, whereas *authenticité* aims to reform African Zairians themselves. “Everything has been said and written; now we must act,” Mobutu reiterated during the Conseil des Ministères de l’Organisation de l’unité africaine in Kinshasa on 6 December 1976.<sup>15</sup>

What then were *authenticité*’s modes of action? Before turning to their concrete application in Zaïre, let us further analyze the modalities of Mobutu’s discourse. Externally, *authenticité* was framed as an inoffensive ideology of freedom, which would not threaten the interests of Mobutu’s allies and supporters, namely the West and the United States, so that the regime could receive the tacit approval of the international community. In a conversation with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1973, Mobutu stated that “non-alignment is Zaïre,” explaining this with the fallacious reasoning of a sophism: “We are neither left nor right. We are authentically Zaïrian.”<sup>16</sup> The opposition between *left* and *right* which Mobutu dismissed as invalid in Zaïre because it would be “inauthentic” closely resembled his rhetorical explanation for the supremacy of “democracy” within his one-party state:

To describe our traditional Negro-African societies, ethnologists and sociologists have invented the concept of “existential democracy.” For us, the aim of discussing—*la palabre*—is to reach a consensus. In France, you are marveling at the idea of discovering “consensus”; let me point out to you that it is an African invention! In Zaïre, we discuss, we speak, we *palabre* and the decision is only reached when unanimity is found on a particular issue. You are surprised by the results of our elections or referendums, of this unanimity achieved through our consultations. The reason is simple. Our people reject the idea of a majority and minority confronting each other.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> “On a donc presque tout dit et tout écrit; ce qui nous reste, c’est d’agir.” Mobutu Sese Seko, “Discours d’ouverture de la onzième session extraordinaire du Conseil des Ministres de l’Organisation de l’unité africaine à Kinshasa (6 décembre 1976),” in *Discours, allocutions et messages*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> United States Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, Office of Central African Affairs, 5 October 1973, “U.S.-Zaïre Relations, [Conversation with President Mobutu]” confidential memorandum of conversation, DNSA Collection: Kissinger Transcripts, accessed 5 April 2016. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1679126007?accountid=14771>

<sup>17</sup> “Pour décrire nos sociétés traditionnelles négro-africaines, ethnologues et sociologues ont inventé le concept de ‘démocratie existentielle.’ Chez nous, la discussion – la palabre – a pour objectif de faire émerger l’unanimité. Vous vous émerveillez actuellement, en France, de découvrir le ‘consensus’; permettez-moi de vous faire remarquer que c’est une invention africaine ! Au Zaïre, on discute, on parle, on palabre et la décision n’intervient qu’une fois l’unanimité faite sur le problème étudié. Vous vous étonnez souvent des scores obtenus à nos

The quote illustrates Mobutu's didactic role, "teaching" the "Other" about African society—in this case, a French journalist—by evoking an authentic feature of Congolese society—the "palaver tree," a traditional assembly of elders who gathered together to discuss important issues pertaining to their community—despite the fact he discarded this very feature in Zaïre as backward and incompatible with the "modernity" he put forward ["It is high time for us to put an end to this era dominated by the oral tradition."<sup>18</sup>] *Authenticité's* "African" rhetoric was projected onto the outside world, as a reminder of the "African heritage" that supposedly disappeared during the colonial era, but was reestablished thanks to Mobutism. Mobutu recast this "African heritage" precisely by relying on Congolese collective memory in order to instill a sense of Zaïrian "national distinctiveness," in pursuit of a similar goal to Léopold II's in late nineteenth-century Belgium. In both cases, it is "a discourse on the past [that] imposes itself essentially as a function of the power it legitimates," as Jewsiewicki writes.<sup>19</sup>

There was therefore a gap between the "African" rhetoric projected onto the "Other," and the way Mobutu conveyed these images at home; and oddly enough, within Zaïre this discourse borrowed as much from precolonial precedents as it did from the colonial legacy. Indeed, the contribution of *authenticité* to Zaïrian society was sometimes framed in terms eerily similar to Belgian propaganda and the language of Catholic missions in the heyday of colonialism. In the *argument de base* of the national symposium on *Authenticité et développement* organized by the Union des écrivains zaïrois and held from 14–21 September 1981 in Kinshasa, one finds this unsettling line about the approach guiding the proceedings: "For a nation, to believe in oneself means to undertake a mission, to carry an ideal, to make a civilizational intrusion into the world." [*Croire en soi pour une nation, c'est se charger d'une mission, poursuivre un idéal, faire dans le monde une irruption civilisatrice.*]<sup>20</sup> The confluence of *authenticité* and *civilization* was not confined to the realm of academia, and is reflected in the attitudes of other parts of Zaïrian society. From 1973 to 1974,

élections ou à nos référendums, de cet unanimité mis en lumière par nos consultations. L'explication est simple. C'est que, chez nous, le peuple rejette la notion de majorité et de minorité qui s'affrontent." Mobutu Sese Seko, *Mobutu: Dignité pour l'Afrique*, 98.

<sup>18</sup> "Il est grand temps de mettre fin à cette ère dominée par la tradition orale." Mobutu Sese Seko, "Discours d'ouverture au deuxième Congrès ordinaire du MPR à la N'Sele (25 novembre 1977)," in *Discours, allocutions et messages*, 185.

<sup>19</sup> Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "Collective Memory and the Stakes of Power: A Reading of Popular Zaïrian Historical Discourses," *History of Africa* Vol. 13 (1986): 197.

<sup>20</sup> Badi-Banga ne Mwine et al., "Argument de base," in *Authenticité et développement*, 21.

Tshibumba Kanda Matulu created a series of 100 paintings depicting the most important events in Congolese history, simply titled *Histoire du Zaïre*. Matulu met with anthropologist Johannes Fabian to discuss his work, and their encounter was recorded; the transcript now serves as a second iteration of his history of Zaïre, augmented by yet another version, a 73-page document Matulu wrote himself in 1980, also titled *Histoire du Zaïre*. Asked to describe one of his paintings illustrating the precolonial “civilization” of the times of Banza Kongo, Matulu answers:

- F: Mm-hmm. But you said that Banza ...  
 T: ... Kongo ...  
 F: ... Kongo and others had civilization. What is civilization?  
 T: Civilization?  
 F: Mm-hmm.  
 T: It's that we have—it is authenticity. [It means that someone] is at home when he eats, dresses, lives, and builds.  
 F: Mm-hmm.  
 T: To build one's home, that is what civilization is like. And to drink at home, all that was civilization.<sup>21</sup>

The official palaver conceived Mobutism as a “civilizational intrusion” in opposition to “tribalism and its cohort of pains”<sup>22</sup> which had to be abandoned as it did not promote the state centralization effort of the Second Republic, regardless of its degree of authenticity; meanwhile, many Zaïrians responded by equating *civilization* with *authenticité*, be it in the past tense or in the present, and practically every aspect of daily life could be defined as such. It is not dissimilar to Belgian thinking toward her possessions on the African continent. In Belgium the word *civilisation* was used *ad nauseam* in order to restore the kingdom's image after the brutality of the Congo Free State—suffice it to recall Arsène Matton's allegorical sculptures adorning the Royal Museum for Central Africa's rotunda entrance hall in Tervuren (including *La Belgique apportant la civilisation au Congo*) commissioned by the Ministry of Colonies to “[symbolize] the beneficial results of Leopoldian and Belgian imperialism

<sup>21</sup> Tshibumba Kanda Matulu and Johannes Fabian, “The History of Zaïre as Told and Painted by Tshibumba Kanda Matulu in Conversation with Johannes Fabian,” *Archives of Popular Swahili* Vol. 2, N° 2 (1998), accessed 5 April 2016, <http://www.lpca.socsci.uva.nl/aps/tshibumbala.html>

<sup>22</sup> Badi-Banga ne Mwine et al., “Argument de base,” 30.

in central Africa.”<sup>23</sup> Even in the late period of Belgian imperialism, when the Colonial Minister Louis Franck began to favor adaptationism over assimilation policies—a view shared by the missionaries who sought to “found new, fairly isolated, communities of pre-industrial, rural Christianity, safeguarded from the detrimental vices of modern Western and urban civilization”<sup>24</sup>—the aim of the colonial state in the Congo recalls the objectives of Mobutu’s *authenticité*, less concerned with “[creating] an imitation European, a Black Belgian, but rather a better Congolese, that is, a robust, vigorous and hard-working Negro, proud of a consciously accomplished task, respectful of the collectivity to which he belongs,” in Franck’s words.<sup>25</sup>

The infantilization of the postcolonial subject is a “pervasive metaphor” in continuity with Zaïre’s political imaginary, to borrow Schatzberg’s expression in his study of the Mobutist regime. It is no accident that Mobutu relied on traditional attributes—the leopard skin being a prime example of such reprocessed precolonial symbols—to establish himself as the omnipotent, generous “Father/Chief” whose benevolence would lead the “national family” on the road to peace, justice, and dignity.<sup>26</sup> In case of improper behavior, rebels received fatherly indulgence, with Mobutu offering to guide them back on the straight path: “We must reintegrate within the nation all of our lost children, we must know how to forget, how to forgive.”<sup>27</sup> The metaphor extends to the benefits provided by the President-Founder to his people, as De Boeck notes:

By means of a perverted interpretation of the traditional “gift logic,” in which debt becomes positive, offering a source of social cohesion, the notion of “gift” (gifts from the “father of the nation” to his children) creates a “debt” and a dependence of the people upon their leader.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Matthew G. Stanard, *Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 116.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Meeuwis, “The Origins of Belgian Colonial Language Policies in the Congo,” *Language Matters* 42:2 (2011): 192.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Crawford Young, “Zaïre: The Shattered Illusion of the Integral State,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 32, N°2 (June 1994): 255.

<sup>26</sup> Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression*, 71–82. See also Filip De Boeck, “Postcolonialism, Power and Identity: Local and Global Perspectives from Zaïre,” in *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, ed. Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (London: Zed Books, 1996), 80–83.

<sup>27</sup> “Il faut réintégrer dans la nation tous ses enfants perdus, savoir oublier, pardonner.” Mobutu Sese Seko, *Mobutu: Dignité pour l’Afrique*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> De Boeck, “Postcolonialism, Power and Identity,” 80.

This relation of dependence based on the gift/debt analogy also permeated the attitudes of the Belgians toward their African counterparts, with the Minister of Colonies Albert de Vleeschauwer declaring in 1939 that “parents may expect their children to contribute as much as possible to maintaining the household.”<sup>29</sup> Colonial rhetoric pertaining to familial imagery is a constant in historical accounts of European imperial history, but Schatzberg insists that the Belgian model differed “in the degree to which paternalism and paternal roles became deliberate aspects of colonial policy,”<sup>30</sup> citing education and religion as the cornerstone of Belgium’s legitimization of colonial rule in Congo, mirrored in the *métropole* by a school curriculum which emphasized the successes of the nation’s “civilizing mission.”<sup>31</sup>

Another expression of this dialectic between the “Father/Chief” and the postcolonial subject can be found in a *Mémoire de réflexion, d’action et d’information* published by the Cabinet du Département de la Défense nationale in 1972, intended to provide guidance to the *Forces armées zaïroises* and explaining the need for political integration between the FAZ and the MPR. The section dedicated to the Chief’s duties in combat makes extensive reference to Machiavelli, using it to highlight the importance of persuasion in overcoming resistance:

Machiavelli already noted in the 16th century [sic] “There are two ways to fight: using laws, and using force: the former is proper to man, the latter proper to beasts; but since the former frequently DOES NOT suffice, we must appeal to the latter. That is why it is necessary for princes (those who were ruling back then) to perfectly practice both beast and man [*savoir bien pratiquer la bête et l’homme*].”<sup>32</sup>

It is striking how the document perpetuates the dichotomy between *man* and *beast* that pervades the imperial discourse, encouraging Zaïre’s mili-

<sup>29</sup> Albert de Vleeschauwer cited in Guy Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885–1980*, trans. Alice Cameron and Stephen Windross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 162.

<sup>30</sup> Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression*, 85.

<sup>31</sup> Stanard, *Selling the Congo*, 131.

<sup>32</sup> “Machiavel notait déjà aux XVIème siècle [sic] ‘Il faut donc savoir qu’il y a deux manières de combattre: l’une par les lois, l’autre par la force: la première sorte est propre aux hommes, la seconde propre aux bêtes; mais comme la première bien souvent NE suffit PAS, il faut recourir à la seconde. Ce pourquoi est nécessaire aux princes (c’était eux qui commandaient à l’époque) de savoir bien pratiquer la bête et l’homme.’” *Mémoire de réflexion, d’action et d’information. Préface du général d’armée Mobutu Sese Seko, commissaire d’État chargé de la Défense nationale, commandant suprême des Forces armées zaïroises*, ed. *Forces armées zaïroises* (Kinshasa: Cabinet du Département de la Défense nationale, 1972), 61–62.

tary to fight “unconscious tribalism” through a recourse to “social and psychological action, which should prevail over armed action.”<sup>33</sup> Obviously, Mobutism and *authenticité* were part of this counterinsurgency strategy. More surprisingly still, the pamphlet describes the evolution of the relationship between the head of state and the army by recalling France’s *Ancien régime* under Louis XIV, offering a new rendition of his famous “L’État, c’est moi” to account for the democratization of the state apparatus: “Since the 19th century, the State has democratized ‘The State is Everyone’ [*L’État c’est tout le monde*] it is all nationals—and to paraphrase LOUIS XIV, it is possible to say ‘The State is Us’ [*L’État c’est nous*].”<sup>34</sup> It is certainly in line with Callaghy’s comparative analysis of Mobutu’s rule and the European absolutist state, in which he revisits the process of state formation in Zaïre in correspondence with the “organic-statist orientation,” “highly bureaucratized” and “personalized” monarchical style of government in seventeenth-century France.<sup>35</sup>

The expression *L’État, c’est nous* beautifully captures the essence of Mobutism: its apparent (but contradictory) democratic purposes, its strange borrowings from European intellectual foundations and facile shortcuts when molding precolonial history to the present. It would be wrong to assume that *authenticité* was nothing but a deceptive proposition. A careful look at its contributions shows that it could be a sincere, if imperfect Afrocentric ideology; it remains outside the scope of our inquiry, but one can find an example in Zaïre’s challenge of the European conception of *terra nullius* at the International Court of Justice in the dispute opposing Spain, Mauritania and Morocco in Western Sahara in 1975.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Mémoire de réflexion, d’action et d’information*, 64–65.

<sup>34</sup> “Depuis le XIX siècle [sic], l’État s’est démocratisé ‘L’État c’est tout le monde’ c’est tous les nationaux – et en paraphrasant LOUIS XIV, il est possible de dire ‘L’État c’est nous.’” *Mémoire de réflexion, d’action et d’information*, 83.

<sup>35</sup> Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle*, 147.

<sup>36</sup> Bayona ba Meya Muna Kimvimba, the President of Zaïre’s Supreme Court, provides the following rationale in support of an “authentically” African conception of land occupation: “For the African, land ownership isn’t solely based on the materialist criterion of land productivity and occupation. It does not matter whether the land is momentarily inhabited or cultivated... From the moment we are born on this land, and especially when this land has welcomed the bodies of our parents, a community of life [communauté de vie] is created between the living and the dead, and despite the absence of external signs, visible signs of land occupation, it can never be considered *terra nullius*.” [“Pour l’Africain, ce n’est pas le critère purement matérialiste de l’effectivité de l’occupation de la terre qui crée le droit de propriété foncière. Il importe peu que la terre ne soit pas momentanément habitée ou cultivée.... Dès l’instant où l’on est né sur une terre et surtout quand cette terre a recueilli en son sein les dépouilles des parents, il se crée entre les vivants et les morts une communauté

It is when considering its usage in practice by the Mobutist regime that one is inevitably confronted with its failings, the subject of inquiry of the following section.

### THE “MAGNIFICENT ZAÏRIAN CAKE”: MOBUTISM IN PRACTICE

As we have seen, although *authenticité* was articulated as being faithful to the “African heritage” it purported to invoke, using a language that it insisted was radically new based on Mobutu’s emphasis on *l’action* over *le verbe*, it nevertheless replicated the colonial rhetoric at discourse level, particularly when addressing Zaïrians themselves. Nevertheless, Mobutu intended to deliver on his promise with tangible propositions for change. Hence the “Zaïrianisation” of Congolese society began in 1972. In addition to the name changes discussed above, the initiative also took the form of a new dress code stressing the need to abandon colonial fashions, with the introduction of the *abacost*, a short or long-sleeved light jacket which supposedly expressed the rejection of foreign manners despite its resemblance to a Mao jacket—*abacost* is an abbreviation for *à bas le costume*, “down with the suit.” One can hardly deny the effectiveness of this venture in the public eye; here too, Matulu’s enthusiasm for the abacost as an expression of *authenticité* in a painting titled *Bonheur—Tranquillité—Joie de vivre en paix* testifies to the success of this incarnation of Mobutism in practice.<sup>37</sup>

*Authenticité*’s cultural applications have been well documented and carefully analyzed by scholars. White examined Mobutu’s recourse to popular music, traditional songs and dance performances in order to reinforce identity politics in the postcolonial state, describing how *animation* became a fundamental component of the regime’s process of political consolidation. *Animation* included TV programs, public demonstrations, and artistic manifestations inspired by folkloric traditions, yet whose mythical content was replaced with words of praise toward Mobutu and the MPR. It became a

de vie à telle enseigne qu’en dépit de l’absence des signes extérieurs, signes visibles d’occupation de la terre, celle-ci ne peut jamais être considérée comme *terra nullius*.”] See 1982 I.C.J. Pleadings, Western Sahara, Vol. IV, Oral Statements, “Exposé oral de M. Bayonaba-Meya, représentant du gouvernement zaïrien,” 439–447.

<sup>37</sup> “That ... is what our authenticity looks like. It is an African idea. Just because the whites brought the material does not mean we follow their ideas when we dress. We arrange our dress the way we see fit.” Matulu cited in Johannes Fabian, *Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaïre* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 175.

civic duty present in the public and private spheres of every Zaïrian's life, a performative requirement mandatory from the time of rising until retiring to sleep.<sup>38</sup> Another of *authenticité*'s cultural claims was the formal request that traditional Congolese artefacts found in Belgian art collections, most notably in Tervuren, be returned to Zaïre. This policy is described in detail by Van Beurden, who highlights the interdependence of Zaïre's repatriation demands and the need for the independent state "to create itself as the guardian of its cultural heritage, which would enable it to construct a cultural legitimacy that underwrote its political legitimacy."<sup>39</sup>

The connection between culture and politics is a constant in the works of White, Van Beurden, Fabian, and others. What is less explored is how this relationship recalls Belgium's own nation-state building effort, heavily reliant on imperial undertakings to affirm its cohesion at a later stage,<sup>40</sup> but originally manufactured by the country's elites rather than being the expression of an "organic or spontaneous" sense of belonging to the great "Belgian" nation on the part of its inhabitants, following a revolution "that may hardly be described as the product of a popular movement," writes Lecours. He traces the creation of Belgium's "territorial identity landscape" to institutional change in the 1830s that allowed the French-speaking bourgeoisie to erect linguistic homogenization as the *raison d'état* of the Belgian sovereign state, which eventually fostered the creation of a Flemish identity in response to these "centralized, unitary and *de facto* unilingual structures":

The specific nature of elite power struggles is a crucial variable in the creation of territorial identities. More specifically, the dynamic of elite competition constitutes a motor of identity formation and transformation. In sum, institutional development and change trigger mechanisms of territorial identity formation not only through direct boundary setting but also by shaping elite relationships, competition and behavior.<sup>41</sup>

The parallel with Mobutu's Zaïre is obvious. State centralization through Mobutism and *recours à l'authenticité* was instituted by a few—though the state apparatus was not defined by ethnic or linguistic affiliation, Lingala-

<sup>38</sup> White, "L'incroyable machine d'authenticité," 55–56.

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Van Beurden, "The Art of (Re)Possession: Heritage and the Cultural Politics of Congo's Decolonisation," *Journal of African History* 56 (2015): 145.

<sup>40</sup> Stanard, *Selling the Congo*, 248–249.

<sup>41</sup> André Lecours, "Political Institutions, Elites, and Territorial Identity Formation in Belgium," *National Identities* Vol. 3, N°1 (2001): 54–56.

speaking Equateurians from the same region as Mobutu dominated the upper levels of the government and the military<sup>42</sup>—just like the French-speaking bourgeois attempted to achieve linguistic hegemony in nineteenth-century Belgium. In the early, predominantly French-speaking Belgian state, the absence of diversity in the state apparatus encouraged the fragmentation of society and the construction of distinct territorial identities (Flemings, Walloons, Brusselers, etc.); in Zaïre, Mobutu's choice of a pluralist orientation was a deliberate policy decision to avoid increasing cleavages within Congolese society—cleavages that brought him to power, after all—a careful move to prevent the repetition of a pattern similar to the Belgian case.<sup>43</sup> Callaghy argues that Zaïre could never be defined as “bourgeois” and that the legacy of the colonial administration can be better described as “political aristocracy,” based on the fact Zaïrian political elites never seemed interested in the collective good, preferring instead to maintain a strictly authoritarian order while extracting resources that could benefit only themselves.<sup>44</sup> The regional dissensions Mobutu faced during his reign were perhaps not mere repeats from the Congo Crisis that followed independence, but attempts at forging similarly distinct territorial identities by competitive elites with conflicting interests, as in the cases of South Kasai and Katanga.

Interestingly, these divisions that the Belgian state sought to nullify within its newly drawn borders from the onset of the Belgian Revolution in 1830–1831 up to the *Belgique en éveil* movement—stunningly typified by Poelaert's Palais de Justice in Brussels<sup>45</sup>—they allowed in their extended empire, when they did not overtly resort to particularism in dealing with indigenous communities. As Schatzberg observes, in Congo “the colonial state forbade the formation of political parties but tolerated elitist cultural

<sup>42</sup> Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression*, 23 and 66. See also Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zaïrian State* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 152.

<sup>43</sup> Mobutu himself drew parallels between Zaïre and Belgium, stating for example: “Let us not compare what cannot be compared, but let's just say the disappearance of tribal temptations [*tentations tribales*] is always slower than one would imagine. Fouron Belgians will certainly not deny this.” In Mobutu Sese Seko, *Mobutu: Dignité pour l'Afrique*, 91. The Voeren/Fourons commune is a disputed enclave in the Walloon region attached to the Limburg province (Flemish). French speakers have sought administrative annexation with Francophone Liège ever since Belgium's linguistic borders were defined in 1961, despite the fact its Flemish residents insisted that the local dialect was closer to the Dutch language.

<sup>44</sup> Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle*, 186–188.

<sup>45</sup> Silverman, “*Modernité sans frontières*,” 709.

organizations constructed around ethnic identities.”<sup>46</sup> Meeuwis argues that Franck’s attempt to instigate informal rule in the Congo (1918–1924) can be understood as a reaction against the process of “Belgianization” (and by extension, “Frenchification”) that took place less than a century before in Belgium, and duplicated three decades later by Léopold in the Congo Free State. A Flemish nationalist himself, Franck might have feared that assimilation in the Congo would result in the “emergence of an African elite, who would arrogantly tend to turn their backs on the masses, and, armed with knowledge and competence, would become capable of threatening the colonizer’s authority.”<sup>47</sup> In the end, a few years of adaptationist rule under Franck could not overcome preceding—and opposite—Belgian assimilationist policies already firmly encroached within the Congo. In retrospect, Franck’s words appear oddly prescient, except this “African elite” turned their back on the masses not simply prior to independence, but long after as well.

It was all the more convenient for Mobutu to authentically reject this aspect of colonial rule by brandishing the threat of national disarray should federalism prevail, while casting himself as the traditional “Bantu chief” responsible for restoring the country’s unity. One may as well consider the public execution of four politicians accused of plotting against him in 1966 as a reiteration of such motif. In his detailed study of Kongo political culture, MacGaffey posits the “objectification” of the chieftain, to be understood as similar to *minkisi* or *nkisi*, that is, in Kavuna’s words, the process of “[incorporating] in [an object] the spirit of some man who in his lifetime killed much game, owned much livestock and many slaves, one who was wily, wealthy, virile and successful in fighting other clans.”<sup>48</sup> The “objectified” chief, everywhere represented as a “leopard” with powers over life and death, is thus “part of the material apparatus of a ritual which objectively represented and confirmed the truth of general principles fundamental to the constitution and continuity of social life, while at the same time the ritual was central to the political and economic processes.”<sup>49</sup>

MacGaffey was referring to the MuKongo tradition, but his analysis can extend to the way power was exercised in Mobutu’s Zaïre. Mobutu seems

<sup>46</sup> Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression*, 22.

<sup>47</sup> Louis Franck cited in Meeuwis, “The Origins of Belgian Colonial Language Policies in the Congo,” 196.

<sup>48</sup> Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 112.

<sup>49</sup> MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture*, 136.

to have purposely perverted chiefly heritage to his advantage, which allowed him to reproduce its characteristic violence—repressing dissent and stifling all opposition—due to the ubiquity of these beliefs in this part of Africa; moreover, *authenticité* proved useful in asserting the validity of this image while insisting that the reform of certain aspects of the chiefly tradition was needed. Conveniently, those that were deemed inappropriate in the age of modernity also happened to be unsuitable to the deformation imposed by the Mobutist state.

The realm of law was the preferred field to institute such amendments. As Young and Turner note, starting 5 January 1973 with the introduction of the 73/015 legislation, “collectivities lost all autonomy and became simple territorial subdivisions,” “distinctions among chieftaincies, sectors, and centres were abolished,” and “collectivity chiefs were integrated into the regional administration.”<sup>50</sup> Ironically, this initiative designed under the guise of a return to “traditional African values” was more in line with Belgian colonial policy, as De Boeck remarks, who further explains that “the repression of traditional chieftaincy, so characteristic of the regime’s policy in the mid-1970s, was not confined to a strictly political level, but was also accompanied by a repressive attitude towards the precolonial cultural heritage as a possible source of resistance against the regime.”<sup>51</sup>

Only in the later years of Mobutu’s reign, from 1982 and well into the 1990s, did the state contemplate the idea of working with traditional power structures instead of simply abolishing them, probably as mounting criticism against the Mobutist regime undermined its legitimacy both at home and abroad.<sup>52</sup> Even before then, the judiciary had been altered to such a degree that it verged on the grotesque. The revised Constitution of 15 August 1974 announced the incorporation of “le Bureau politique, le Congrès, le Conseil législatif, le Conseil exécutif [et] le Conseil judiciaire” into the MPR, and the decision was supported by *authenticité*’s rhetoric insofar as it could serve the regime’s purposes:

Thus are translated the principle of dialogue, the spirit of the *palabre*, in a manner consistent with our traditional political conception, and in an effort not to compel, but to persuade; the full power recognized in the person of the Chief of the *Mouvement populaire de la révolution* [Mobutu] translates,

<sup>50</sup> Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 236–237.

<sup>51</sup> De Boeck, “Postcolonialism, Power and Identity,” 82.

<sup>52</sup> De Boeck, “Postcolonialism, Power and Identity,” 83.

in turn, another traditional political reality, namely the lack of chieftain plurality and separation of powers [*l'ignorance de la pluralité des chefs et de la séparation des pouvoirs*].<sup>53</sup>

The concentration of authority in the hands of the chief had already been made effective with legislation passed on 15 February 1972, proclaiming that the words of the head of state had legal force in Zaïre [*les paroles du Chef de l'État ont force de loi*].<sup>54</sup> An analogy can be made with Léopold II's rule of the Congo by decree through 1908, the king having arranged through legal means his sole ownership of a territory of 20 million people.<sup>55</sup> The notion of *terra nullius* that Zaïre contested in 1975 by outlining a new definition based on *authenticité* is somewhat reminiscent of Léopold's utilization of the term *terres vacantes* in order to assert his right to land in the Congo. As Silverman shows, he relied on a team of judicial advisors, among whom was jurisconsult Edmond Picard, who declared in 1885 that "all open and unclaimed land, or *terres vacantes*, was the property of the state, that is, the king's property." A judgment drafted on 15 November 1892 by Picard, then a lawyer at the Brussels Supreme Court, "asserted the sound legal basis for the definition of the domainal *terres vacantes*" and concluded that "the king's property rights superseded requirements for free trade as stipulated in the 1884 Berlin Conference."<sup>56</sup>

Those *terres vacantes* constituted a major source of capital that had to be leased, since Léopold did not possess the resources to exploit his entire domain.<sup>57</sup> Between 1876 and 1889, a number of private companies were created to make the Congo Free State profitable through the collection of ivory and rubber extraction. Some like the *Association internationale africaine* (AIA) were motivated by laudable humanitarian intentions, despite being essentially front organizations. Léopold reserved himself the

<sup>53</sup> "Ainsi se trouvent traduits de manière conforme à notre conception politique traditionnelle, le principe du dialogue, l'esprit de la palabre dans le souci non de contraindre, mais de persuader; la plénitude des pouvoirs reconnue dans la personne du Chef du Mouvement populaire de la révolution [Mobutu] traduit, à son tour, une autre réalité politique traditionnelle, à savoir l'ignorance de la pluralité des chefs et de la séparation des pouvoirs." Bayona ba Meyu Muna Kimvumba, "Le recours à l'authenticité dans la réforme du droit au Zaïre," in *Dynamiques et finalités des droits africains: Actes du colloque de la Sorbonne "La vie du droit en Afrique,"* ed. Gérard Conac (Paris: Economica, 1980), 232.

<sup>54</sup> Pauwels and Pintens, *La législation zaïroise relative au nom*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Silverman, "Modernité sans frontières," 738.

<sup>56</sup> Edmond Picard cited in Silverman, "Modernité sans frontières," 753–754.

<sup>57</sup> Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, *Histoire générale du Congo*, 323.

right to a majority of shareholdings, leading Hochschild to compare the king's pursuit as that of the "manager of a venture capital syndicate" who "found a way to attract other people's capital to his investment schemes while he retained half the proceeds."<sup>58</sup> When Léopold was forced to renounce his claims to the Congo in 1908 after reports of ruthless massacres committed in the African heartland started to appear in European newspapers, the economic workings of the Belgian colony did not fundamentally change. Léopold received some 50 million francs "as a mark of gratitude for his great sacrifices made for the Congo,"<sup>59</sup> individual investors held onto their portfolios and private corporations retained a firm hand on the colony's sizeable resources. After independence, the former colony attempted to reverse the trend by promulgating the Bakajika Law in 1966, which "stipulated that all public land was a domain of the Zaïrian nation-state, and formally extinguished all land grants and concessionary powers delegated by the colonial state."<sup>60</sup>

Under the Second Republic, Mobutu affirmed his intention to continue this process through the "Zaïrianisation" of the economy, a platform vaguely described on 30 November 1973 before the National Legislative Council. Here again, the state's seizure and redistribution of agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing foreign assets was promoted with the language of *authenticité*, whose interpretation of land ownership summoned the "African tradition" in support of its pretensions. In the words of Bayona ba Meya Muna Kimvimba, the President of the Supreme Court:

There is a constant upheld in most, if not all African customs, whereby the land is never subject to individual ownership; land ownership is, and has always been, collective; land could never be subjected to alienation, because selling the land would have amounted to selling one's soul, one's proper forces, one's cosmic forces.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 117.

<sup>59</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 259.

<sup>60</sup> Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zaïrian State*, 288.

<sup>61</sup> "Il est une constante en honneur dans la plupart sinon dans la totalité des coutumes africaines, selon laquelle, la terre n'a jamais fait l'objet d'appropriation individuelle; la propriété foncière est et a toujours été collective; jamais la terre ne pouvait faire l'objet d'une aliénation, car vendre la terre eût équivalu à vendre son âme, ses forces propres, ses forces cosmiques." Bayona ba Meya Muna Kimvimba, "Le recours à l'authenticité dans la réforme du droit au Zaïre," 232.

Since it was Mobutism's objective to put the country's resources to good use, the "collective good" that was land had to be made more efficient. On 26 December 1973, the Bureau politique, Conseil des Ministres, and a number of deputies gathered to discuss the practical application of Mobutu's call to action. In effect, they bartered slices of the "magnificent Zaïrian cake," to paraphrase Léopold's own reading of the Scramble for Africa: the acquisition of these newly nationalized businesses was made by the ruling political elite and Mobutu's close entourage. There was public outcry in Zaïre following the implementation of these measures. Mobutu responded by bureaucratizing his "Zaïrianisation" plan, in an effort to appear transparent while officializing neopatrimonial practices through paperwork. Theoretically, any Zaïrian could therefore buy a plantation or a business from the state by filling out a form, and after the conduct of a solvency check was performed. This did not prevent members of the Bureau politique to be awarded plantations, and deputies to be exempted from the painstaking application process:

The cement of clientage was access to resources. The sudden takeover of this huge zone of the economy offered a vast new pool of goods for patrimonial distribution to deserving members of the political class... Potentially lucrative assets were to be acquired as virtually free goods; the political capital of proximity to power could be thus converted into solid material equity with the promise of effortless accumulation. Among other things, the Zaïrianisation measures were a class action by the politico-commercial bourgeoisie.<sup>62</sup>

The "Zaïrianisation" initiative was obviously a failure, marred by the incompetence of corrupted *acquéreurs* with no previous experience or knowledge of whole swathes of Zaïre's economy—but with a penchant for tax evasion—whose actions led to massive layoffs, rampant shortages, and inflation. The subsequent "radicalization of the Zaïrian revolution" heralded in 1976 in light of the disastrous state of the Zaïrian economy was yet another smokescreen: while publicly reiterating the need to declare "war on the bourgeoisie" by forcing various industries like transportation, petroleum, mines, agriculture, metallurgy, financial institutions, and tourism to come under state control, Mobutu limited the scope of his reform program and only a handful of enterprises were affected by the empty piece of legislation. These voluntary mistakes were only made worse by the fall in copper prices and the rise of oil toward the end of the 1970s,

<sup>62</sup> Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zaïrian State*, 328 and 338.

which prompted Mobutu to announce the “Mobutu Plan” in 1977. Despite its name, none of it was the work of the leader himself, since the plan in question was to seek foreign aid and turn to Western creditors for help.<sup>63</sup> The relation of dependence that Mobutu fiercely condemned and combated through his *recours à l'authenticité*—but never truly expunged and, on the contrary, perpetuated in his conception of the state apparatus—appeared to have been solely reformed in postcolonial Zaïre, the same way the “African tradition” Mobutu obstinately upheld became a rhetorical instrument at the service of an oppressive potentate whose very origins may be confounded with those of the imperial father figure itself.

There is a tendency in academic literature about the Mobutist state to cast Zaïrians as “helpless spectators” in the face of the countless abuses committed by the regime, as Young and Turner suggest; Schatzberg insists that Mobutu succeeded in the “occupation of all available political space and ideological obfuscation” through strategies of dominance and coercion; Callaghy, comparing the fate of the Zaïrian citizen to that of the Frenchman under absolutist rule, contends that centralization weakened the power of traditional communities and destroyed their sense of identity while increasing their dependence on the totalitarian state.<sup>64</sup> I do not mean to underplay the devastating consequences to Zaïrian society of Mobutu’s alteration of the “African heritage” to serve his own ends. Perhaps one of the reasons why the regime remained in power for so long is because of the ambiguous nature of *authenticité* and its versatility in coopting traditional features of Congolese society—patrilineal power relations or the “objectification” of the chieftain—in support of a repressive intent. After all, the *abacost* and *animation* did find a number of supporters, including Matulu, at least at the time when they were first introduced. Nevertheless, such understanding of the postcolonial subject as completely acquiescent or subservient seems to overlook possible strategies of insubordination that lay outside our common conceptions of resistance, time, and history.

Consider the endurance of practices like *kindoki*, *toro*, *iloki*, or *evu*, whose translations as “witchcraft” oftentimes inaccurately “[allocate] the concepts to a domain, together with ‘magic,’ ‘religion,’ and ‘superstition,’ in which they are subject to analyses that question their rationality,” as MacGaffey

<sup>63</sup>Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zaïrian State*, 354–356, 361 and 391–395.

<sup>64</sup>Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zaïrian State*, 395; Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression*, 142; Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle*, 422.

notes.<sup>65</sup> Instead of approaching *kindoki* as the mere belief in occult forces—and thus positing its lack of validity as a coherent system of thought—MacGaffey highlights both its strengths and its weaknesses as a political theory, not better nor worse than the tenets upon which our democracies are built. “Opposition to Mobutu in the 1990s included scandalous and often pornographic stories,” he writes, “widely circulated in the press as well as by word of mouth, which accused him of strengthening his person and his regime by witchcraft and by occult techniques.”<sup>66</sup> De Boeck mentions the lingering suspicion that “nocturnal powers and forces” were a key factor in power struggles throughout the Congo’s history, noting that the Luunda king was suspected to “eat” his descendants.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, MacGaffey emphasizes the fact “wealthy people [were] admired for their ability to consume, to ‘eat’ (*dia*) [while] witches [were] supposed literally to consume the substance of others, to ‘eat people’ (*dia bantu*),” adding that “chiefs (and in Zaïre the President of the Republic and his associates) were believed to increase their power by acquiring the vital force of their victims.”<sup>68</sup> This was reflected in the testimony of Dominique Sakombi Inongo, Mobutu’s former Minister of Information who, once disgraced, admitted that he had been working with sorcerers and participated in meetings during which the ruling elite feasted with demons.<sup>69</sup> Whether all these examples are acts of dissidence that actively worked against the regime—though Sakombi Inongo’s confessions certainly did—or simply “authentic” characteristics of Congolese society that withstood their attempted discontinuation under the “modern” terms of *authenticité*, remains to be determined. It is nonetheless interesting to note that such practices have prevailed in the Congo from precolonial times to the present day, and further research should be conducted in order to assess the political, social, and cultural role of *kindoki* in reaction to the foreign innovations of Belgian rule, and later the domestic perversions of the Mobutist state.

Studying the authenticity that *authenticité* purposefully evaded would allow us to look at Congolese history itself at face value, without discarding the singularities that distinguish it from other societies. We must do this, in part, by acknowledging the fact these terms that help us make sense of the

<sup>65</sup> MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture*, 225.

<sup>67</sup> De Boeck, “Postcolonialism, Power and Identity,” 81.

<sup>68</sup> MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture*, 34.

<sup>69</sup> See Pius Ngandu Nkashama, *Les magiciens du repentir: Les confessions de Frère Dominique* (Sakombi Inongo) (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995).

world—words like “state,” “nation” and “government”—do not always reflect the reality they are meant to convey, whether due to the failings of an oppressive regime<sup>70</sup> or the shortcomings of their conceptual underpinnings. The persistence of *kindoki* also indicates that it is crucial to take into consideration a different time that is not our own, this “time of history and of collective memory (culturally Judeo-Christian) [which] provides the basis for the objectivisation of the world,” in Jewsiewicki’s words,<sup>71</sup> nor the “suspended time” calling for the erasure of a traumatic experience while establishing two separate epochs that gravitate around an impenetrable wound—a time *authenticité* exemplifies, but as the rule rather than the exception. This time permeates the way we remember the past in African and European historiographies as in political discourses, be it in the former imperial Belgium or in the Zaïrian postcolony. It remains a necessity to look at history from the perspective of yet another time, one that resists our attempts to conquer it, to subject it to the paradoxical and biased histories we tell ourselves in a desperate effort to grasp the meaning of, and retain control over, these memories that stubbornly refuse to leave us.

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<sup>70</sup> As De Boeck writes: “Why is a building called ‘national bank,’ ‘university,’ ‘state department,’ ‘hospital’ or ‘school’ when the activities which take place in it cannot be given standard meanings and realities usually covered by those words? ... Why continue the social convention of referring to a banknote as ‘money’ when one is confronted daily with the fact that it is just a worthless slip of paper?” In De Boeck, “Postcolonialism, Power and Identity,” 91.

<sup>71</sup> Bogumil Jewsiewicki and V. Y. Mudimbe, “Africans’ Memories and Contemporary History of Africa.” *History and Theory* Vol. 32, N°4, Beiheft 32: History Making in Africa (1993): 6.

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## CHAPTER 9

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# World War II and West African Soldiers in Asia, 1943–1947

*Oliver Coates*

Mobilising over 200,000 West Africans, of whom around 73,290 fought in Asia, World War II prompted an unprecedented West African presence in South Asia.<sup>1</sup> The time Africans spent in India was a major dimension of African participation in the war. Furthermore, many historians have understood the war years as vital in broadening the horizons of African soldiers, a claim that has found new life in contemporary West African fiction.<sup>2</sup> In India, Africans encountered a society in flux; Gandhian mass nationalism and a wartime industrial production drive following the Raj's Bombay Plan, jostled with the opulent luxury of strategically important cities such as Bombay and Calcutta, as well as the grinding poverty of a sub-continent

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<sup>1</sup>David Killingray, "The Idea of a British Imperial African Army." *Journal of African History* 20, no. 3 (1979): 421–36, 433, fn.85.

<sup>2</sup>Biyi Bandele-Thomas, *Burma Boy*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007); Babatunde, R. "Bombay's Republic." In *African Violet and Other Stories*, eds... (Oxford: New Internationalist, 2012).

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where the urban cost of living had risen by between 200% and 300% in just a few months of 1944.<sup>3</sup> But Africans also encountered a range of new experiences in more mundane areas of life such as eating with cutlery, enjoying a loaf of bread, and consuming tinned meat.<sup>4</sup> Did this unprecedented barrage of new experiences lead to a generation of nationalist servicemen? The answer is inconclusive, and despite the 1948 protests of ex-servicemen in Accra, the link between nationalism and military service has never been proven.<sup>5</sup>

Consider Sergeant Bombay, the fictional protagonist of Rotimi Babatunde's Cain-Prize-winning story "Bombay's Republic," who returns home transformed by his time in Asia, but unable to integrate into civilian life. Instead, he creates an eccentric republic in a derelict building on the edge of the village and, from this quixotic vantage point, reflects on the boundless possibilities that the war has opened in his mind. We will see that there is much to commend Bombay's celebration of possibility, and that there were ample reasons for enlisted Nigerians in India to share their faith in the exciting future that opened out before them in 1945. They had endured appalling racism, a nakedly discriminatory regime of discipline, clothing, and repeated attempts by the British Army to undermine and even erase their achievements on the battlefield, most notably by omitting them from official despatches; but despite all of these injustices they had been seen by British and Indian colleagues to fight bravely against the Japanese. Many men had received an unparalleled level of education and welfare in the colonial army; they had enjoyed regular pay, and eaten a better diet than many could have expected back home in Nigeria. More subtle changes had worked their influence too; although hardly models of racial tolerance, many British Army officers had little understanding of, or sympathy for, the racial hierarchies that were customary in the Royal West African Frontier Force and dictated ceilings on African pay, promotion, and even specific designs of uniform. They expected that African soldiers received just as much assistance from the colonial government, as their British counterparts might expect from the metropolitan authorities.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985., p. 345; Stein, Burton. *A History of India*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 353; Bayly, Chris and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the War with Japan*. (London: Penguin, 2005), 39.

<sup>4</sup> David Killingray, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War*. (Oxford: James Currey, 2010), 93.

<sup>5</sup> N. J. Miners, *The Nigerian Army, 1956–1966*. (London: Methuen, 1971), 28.

This chapter will not examine Africans' combat record in detail, nor will it explore the fascinating question of the soldiers' perceptions of the fighting in Burma, their acquisition of literacy, or their analyses of India. Rather, it will attempt to establish the material outlines of African soldiers' leisure time in India, in terms of encounters with Indians, and new commodities. Our subject matter will therefore be relatively quotidian and devoid of exciting tales of the fighting itself. The two areas upon which we focus—the relation between African soldiers and Indian civilians, and their consumption of new foods and commodities, point to far reaching experiential changes during the soldiers' military service. We are not primarily concerned with the consequences of these encounters, but rather with delineating their occurrence within India during the second half of the war. Drawing on military and colonial sources from the National Archives, Rhodes House Commonwealth collection at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and the Imperial War Museum in London, as well as reports in the African press, we will discuss experiences that were shared among soldiers from Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia. The fact that more focus is given to Nigeria is a reflection of the author's own research experience to date and is in no way an analytic choice. Our contention is that the Asian service of West Africans *tout court* demands reconsideration. Readers may be disappointed by the lack of coverage of the 56,100 West Africans who fought in the East Africa campaign, or the 16,472 of their comrades who were active in the Middle East; these important subjects must await future research.<sup>6</sup>

### AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND WARTIME INDIA: BEYOND NATIONALISM

Historians have largely overlooked African overseas military service. A recent volume focuses almost exclusively on the “home front” and civilian life in Africa during the war; whilst Killingray and Rathbone acknowledge the importance of military service, largely to locate this within Africa itself.<sup>7</sup> Much truth remains in the latter authors' contention that “the war has remained more of an assumption than a reality”; this is certainly the

<sup>6</sup> Killingray, “The Idea,” 433, fn.85.

<sup>7</sup> Judith Byfield, “Preface.” In *Africa and World War II*, edited by Judith Byfield, Carolyn A Brown, Timothy Parsons and Ahamad Alawad Sikainga, xvii–xxiii. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Killingray, David, and Richard Rathbone. *Africa and the Second World War*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

case with soldiers' experiences overseas.<sup>8</sup> Military service in the Middle East, South Asia, and East Africa is not a major subject in the social historiography of World War II African armies which have instead focused on how the African soldiery was able to secure "additional benefits and concessions by playing civil and military authorities off against each other."<sup>9</sup> Our contention here is not that such foci as civilian life and military service inside Africa are anything less than vital to our understanding of the war; but rather that the activities of African servicemen overseas deserve equal attention.<sup>10</sup>

We will not offer a comprehensive survey of overseas military service in this chapter but will instead outline two significant areas. As Jackson has observed there has been no dedicated account of African soldiers' overseas war service. There are many dimensions such a study might take with the strategic deployment of Africans troops jostling with their perceptions of conflict, the intellectual influence of military service, their contact with unprecedented forms of technology and patterns of consumption, and their interaction with South Asian or Middle Eastern peoples and cultures.<sup>11</sup> But before we continue, we must confront one area in which African overseas military service is repeatedly invoked in a mythic and talismanic manner: the influence of nationalism on servicemen in Asia. As Rathbone and Killingray contend, "few modern historians of Africa have not invoked" the war "as an explanation for the termination of certain policies" and, in particular, for "the ushering in of the circumstances giving rise to modern mass nationalism."<sup>12</sup> This generalised linkage between servicemen and nationalism may take two forms: either that servicemen themselves became nationalists in significant numbers or that they exercised a radicalising influence upon colonial politics after 1945.<sup>13</sup> Thus,

<sup>8</sup> David Killingray and Rathbone Richard, "Introduction." In David Killingray and Richard Rathbone, *Africa and the Second World War*, edited by David Killingray and Richard Rathbone, 1–19. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964*. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), 105; Stapleton, Timothy Joseph. *African Police and Soldiers in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1923–80*. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011); Jackson, Ashley. *Botswana 1939–1945: An African Country at War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Rathbone and Killingray "Africa", p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, "Botswana," 57.

<sup>12</sup> Rathbone and Killingray, "Africa," 1.

<sup>13</sup> James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (California University Press, Berkeley 1958).

Coleman asserts that it is “not surprising to find ex-servicemen among the more militant leaders of the nationalist movement during the post-war period, while arguing that the war led to ‘intellectual ferment.’”<sup>14</sup> Davidson argues that “the anti-colonial ideas of ex-servicemen” constituted a key “positive agenc[y]” for “modernizing change.”<sup>15</sup> Reid phrases this more carefully, conceding that the point is “contested,” but that “the evidence suggests that soldiers were often more politicised, and did sometimes become active in politics after the war, but that many instead returned to villages and farms with no particular interest in challenging the colonial order.”<sup>16</sup> Without a doubt there were individual servicemen who were profoundly influenced by Gandhian mass nationalism, just as there were a number of veterans engaged in civil protest, as occurred in Makurdi in 1947, Accra in 1948, or in Umuahia in 1950, or in formal politics with J. M. Johnson acting as Federal Minister for Labour during Nigeria’s First Republic.<sup>17</sup> It must be stressed not only that by no means all, or even most, of these cases involved any form of nationalism (whether anti-colonial, mass, elite, cultural, to name a few), but also that very little is understood about the relation between the war and political activity even in these cases of nationalist veterans. Ultimately, it would be a travesty to dismiss all possibility of nationalist influence, but the question here is one of emphasis and balance; Asia left its mark in a variety of ways, of which politicisation was only one dimension.

What do we find when we venture beyond the question of nationalist soldiers? This relatively uncharted territory is rich with possibility. As Killingray’s pioneering survey of African military service has shown, soldiers became a “great mass of consumers,” largely to the new foods and commodities they encountered on military service.<sup>18</sup> Tins, plates, mugs, mess-tins, cutlery, tables, and chairs were all new; so too were British rations with bully beef, bread, and tea.<sup>19</sup> This is emphatically not to paint

<sup>14</sup> Coleman, “Nigeria,” 230, 254.

<sup>15</sup> Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History*, (London: Longman, 1989), 95.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Reid, *Warfare in African History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 152.

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Nwaka, “Rebellion in Umuahia, 1950–1951: Ex-Servicemen and Anti-Colonial Protest in Eastern Nigeria.” *Transafrican Journal of History* 16 (1987): 47–62; Schleh, Eugene, “The Post-War Careers of Ex-Servicemen in Ghana and Uganda.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1968): 203–20, 210; Killingray “Fighting”, 218.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

military service as a consumerist utopia and, as Killingray estimates, Gold Coast troops likely received the same cuisine as prisoners of war.<sup>20</sup> For many soldiers regular payment in cash was a novelty, as were the savings accounts introduced by the Army Savings Scheme after December 1943; 37,000 Gold Coast soldiers had cumulatively saved around £ 158,523, or £40 each by 1945.<sup>21</sup>

New cultural and affective horizons were opened during Africans' time in Asia—subjects that have received very little exploration in African historiography. “We did not experience,” reflected Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) soldier Pius Osakwe, “any colour prejudice in love affairs.”<sup>22</sup> Cities like Calcutta were notorious for their military brothels largely staffed by starving Bengali women, and, as we will see, Africans largely escaped British military control during their time in urban India. African American troops in the segregated US army patronised black clubs such as the Cosmos Club and the Grand Hotel, in Delhi.<sup>23</sup> But some affective ties were more long-standing, as witnessed by the largely forgotten history of African soldiers who brought back their Indian wives to live with them in West Africa.<sup>24</sup>

Although beyond the scope of our discussion, literacy and writing constitute major elements of overseas military service. The ethnic diversification of the RWAFF during the war led to the “introduction of what was called ‘Basic English,’” a form of functional language taught for military and diplomatic purposes, which was “that kind of English language that did not conform strictly” to formal English.<sup>25</sup> From the British officers impressed by African Non-Comissioned Officers “whose illiteracy necessitated that they literally memorize the weapon training manual” to men who penned sophisticated letters to nationalist newspapers back in Africa, soldiers occupied every point on the spectrum of literacy.<sup>26</sup> Petitions, now recognised as a significant body

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>23</sup> Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War*. (London: Vintage, 2016) 239; Raghavan, Srinath. *India's War: The Making of Modern South Asia 1939–1945*. (London: Penguin, 2017) 297.

<sup>24</sup> National Archives Ibadan, CSO 26/4 Marriage of Soldiers of RWAFF to Non-Natives, OAG Nigeria to Resident Minister Achimota, 7th November 1944.

<sup>25</sup> Amadi, Levi Onyemuche. “The Reactions and Contributions of Nigerians During the Second World War: Agents of Political Integration in Nigeria, 1939–1945.” *Transafrican Journal of History* 6/7 (1977–78): 1–11.7, 9.

<sup>26</sup> J. H. Morrow, “Black Africans in World War II: The Soldiers' Stories.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 632 (2010): 12–25, 21.

of source material on civilian life in wartime Africa, also connected soldiers, their families, and colonial officials, thereby establishing an epistolary traffic between Africa and Asia.<sup>27</sup>

### AFRICAN JOURNEYS IN INDIA

The relationship of Africans and Indian civilians is relatively well documented due to British anxieties about the supposedly subversive influence of nationalist Indians on African soldiers. Unfortunately, many observations were marred by tenacious racial stereotyping. As Colonial Office official Sabben-Clare minuted, “it would be interesting” to know “the opinion held of the African by the Indians themselves,” and he continued, “do they like them, and respect them, or do they regard them as an inferior race?” The Secretary of State would similarly ask General King himself to “keep an eye on the welfare of African troops in Ceylon, India and Burma” because “they require special treatment.”<sup>28</sup>

A particularly cherished belief among British officials, in London, Delhi, and Lagos, was that Africans and Indians were bound to mistrust each other; that Africans allegedly regarded Indians as effete, whereas Indians, for their part, were prejudiced against blacks. Thus, according to a British Army morale report, Africans “despise[d] the Bengali,” another report boldly asserted that “the West African dislike[s] India,” and tends to “undervalue the Indian soldier.”<sup>29</sup> One officer reflected on his amusement at “how the troops behaved towards the Indians, consider[ing] themselves far superior.”<sup>30</sup> “African troops were disdainful of Indians,” explained another former officer:

[T]hey called them “Indus” and saw at once [that] they were a subject race – no surprise to them. My soldiers stared with a mock ferocity at the Indian coolies lounging on the wharf ... criticising their solemn manners and skinny bodies, exclaiming in horror when they saw them squirting blood-red jets of betel juice into the dust.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Chima Korieh, *“Life Not Worth Living:” Nigerian Petitions Reflecting an African Society’s Experiences During World War II*. (Durham: Caroline Academic Press, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> TNA CO 820 55 3 Sabben Clare Minute 14 Jan 1944; CO 820 55 3, Extract from Note for the Secretary of State’s Talk with General King on December 7th 1944.

<sup>29</sup> TNA, WO 203/2268 Report on the morale of British, Indian, and Colonial Troops of Allied Land Force for the months of February, March and April 1945.

<sup>30</sup> RHO mss.af.s.1734 (55) Bonser Personal Papers p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> IWM, 80/49/1, Papers of Lieutenant Colonel C.C.A. Crafae, p. 87.

The same officer would later remark on Africans “despised such Indian peasants as they came across and treated the camp charwallah with swaggering contempt.”<sup>32</sup> Freely invoking British stereotypes of Indians as “complacent” and unmanly, these accounts must be treated with caution, but they nonetheless provide a rare description of African responses to Indian society. To appreciate just how limited the explanatory powers of military officers can be, we must contrast two statements on Africans’ morale in India. According to one army official, Africans were “beginning to show a distinct interest in repatriation.”<sup>33</sup> Conversely, the officer Crafrae, whose descriptions we encountered above and who had far closer sustained contact with Africans, commented that Africans “seemed not to miss their women, their drink, and other urban delights of Nigerian cities.”<sup>34</sup> There was a significant distinction between demoralised soldiers awaiting repatriation at the end of the war and the excited new arrivals on the sub-continent; the latter were able to enjoy the relative freedoms of visiting towns and engaging in leisure activities in barracks.

There were enormous differences in culture, wealth, and education between the 22,400 African American troops in India, and their African counterparts. Nonetheless, the former group provides an invaluable comparison point from which to assess Indian racism. British military and colonial officials had long held that Africans would be subject to racial prejudice in India due to the stigma associated with darker skin, particularly among higher caste Hindus.<sup>35</sup> Educated African American travellers in India appear to have shared this analysis and “often asserted that American racial oppression was less severe, or at least no more severe, than caste oppression in India.”<sup>36</sup> The Japanese repeatedly used the spectre of African American and African soldiers in their propaganda targeting Indians; they circulated lurid tales of African American clubs in Calcutta.<sup>37</sup> Such fears were not simply confections of the Japanese army; they played

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, WO 203/2268, “Report on the morale of British, Indian, and Colonial Troops of Allied Land Force for the months of August, September and October 1944.”

<sup>34</sup> IWM 80/49/1, Crafrae, p. 95.

<sup>35</sup> Antoinette Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 191.

<sup>37</sup> Gerald Horne, *The End of Empires: African Americans and India*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), p. 163.

on very real fears among Indians. Fazul Haq gave a speech alleging that 30,000 Muslim women had been given to African and American soldiers in Bengal and decrying sexual exploitation.<sup>38</sup> But as Raghavan has observed, African American experiences in India were far more complicated; the US military soon noted that African Americans were “frequently ... invited to attend native civilian parties to which white troops are not invited” and many men attempted to adopt an Indian child as a “mascot.”<sup>39</sup> One photograph published in the Baltimore *Afro-American* showed a black soldier playing baseball with an Indian policeman.<sup>40</sup> In any case, we should exercise caution before resorting to caste as an interpretive frame; there is no reason why relations between Africans and Muslims would be similar to those the former enjoyed with Hindus, and the position of Africans in Southern India is likely to have been very different to their experience in the north where southern Indians were stigmatised for their darker skin, and so divorced from the imagined “Aryan” heritage of paler-skinned Northerners.<sup>41</sup>

African soldiers sporadically came into contact with African Americans; while working on the Calcutta docks in 1943, there was “no evidence of anything but a mild interest between the black troops of the two cultures.”<sup>42</sup> In some cases, contact between African Americans and Africans was far more personal. One Nigerian, Private Samuel Babatunde Sule, received a shock when, visiting Calcutta with a friend, he was surprised to find a familiar face among the crowd: it was his American cousin Tunji Thompson.<sup>43</sup> Having embarked as a sailor in Lagos, Thompson had crossed the Atlantic and settled in the United States, before enlisting in the US Army. While serving for four months in India, he happened to meet Sule by coincidence. To celebrate, Thompson and Sule shared dinner at a large hotel in Calcutta, and Thompson, with his substantially higher US Army pay, apparently footed the bill. We know of the men’s

<sup>38</sup> Khan “Raj”, 242.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Raghavan “India,” 298.

<sup>40</sup> Horne “The End”, 163.

<sup>41</sup> Jave Majeed, *Ayranism and Empire*, History Workshop Journal, Vol. 58, 1 (2004), pp. 312–316; Bayly Susan, *Case, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 255.

<sup>42</sup> RHO, mss.af.1734 (357), Ronald Ryder RWAFF Papers, Responses to questionnaire.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Nigerian Soldier Meets His Cousin In U.S. Army Unexpectedly in Indian City,’ Nigerian Daily Times, 17th February 1944; TNA, CO 820 55 3, Tadman to Rolleston, 5th February 1944.

meeting because Sule was literate, and penned an account of the evening. The tale soon circulated among British officers commanding African troops in India, and found its way back into the West African press as a “West African Forces Observer” official news story. We are also left with an impression of just how condescending even sympathetic British officers could be towards African soldiers. The Army public relations officer relayed the episode back to the Colonial Office in London, noting with condescension that “an amusing picture is obtained of the two dining.”<sup>44</sup>

If Africans enjoyed an ambivalent reception in India, they too held mixed attitudes towards their hosts. Here again, we must reach beyond the veneer of consensus in colonial and military sources. It seems likely that, with significant exceptions, there was relatively little contact sustained between African soldiers and Indian civilians. There were few opportunities for Africans to spend considerable amounts of time with Indians. However, short-term informal and transactional relationships flourished, such as buying tea or foodstuffs from street salesmen. In this context British observers repeatedly stress Africans’ sense of “superiority” to Indians. SEAC’s publicity officer maintained that “far from being overawed by India,” Africans had “maintained rather a fatherly relationship” with Indians.<sup>45</sup> Such “superiority” was rooted in Africans’ shock at the highly visible poverty in wartime India; malnutrition and extreme penury were reaching severe proportions across swathes of the sub-continent by 1943 and 1944.<sup>46</sup> In particular, the sight of beggars was novel to many West African soldiers, with comparably public displays of poverty being relatively rare in their home colonies. At many railway stations on the long journey inland from Bombay soldiers were astonished to be confronted with “three or four beggars outside each carriage door.”<sup>47</sup> “We noticed,” one RWAFF officer recalled, “that [the Africans] almost invariably looked down on Indians and often treated them with supreme contempt.”<sup>48</sup> This attitude extended to respecting Indian officers, and the British “had great difficulty in persuading our troops that Indian officers had to be saluted.”<sup>49</sup> More vaguely, certain RWAFF officers asserted that Africans’ disregard for Indian soldiers stemmed from the fact that “the physique of the average

<sup>44</sup> TNA, CO 820 55 3, Tadman to Rolleston, 5th February 1944.

<sup>45</sup> TNA, CO 820 55 3, Tadman to Rolleston, 5th February 1944.

<sup>46</sup> Misra “Vishnu”, 231.

<sup>47</sup> RHO, mss.aff.s.1960, Hibbert Papers, ‘Nigerians in South Africa and India.’

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Indian was poor,” and that Africans were not able to see “the crack Indian Regiments.”<sup>50</sup> This latter assertion must be treated with extreme caution because it neatly dovetails African perceptions with a declining, but still tenacious, belief amongst British officers in the efficacy of “martial races” such as the Sikhs, as opposed to the alleged effeminacy of the Bengalis and other groups. In 1943, from a colonial perspective wedded to the crumbling edifice of martial race, the most prized units of the Indian Army were still active in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Africans had spent time with supposedly martial troops; in 1944, West Africans spent days socialising with the 6th Rajput Rifles in Delhi, spending time watching boxing matches and sharing meals.<sup>52</sup>

Other than contempt, what were African soldiers’ responses to Asia? It is clear that military discipline failed to regulate Africans’ contacts with Indians, and most communication between the soldiers and local civilians passed below the radar of officialdom. Similarly, officers were not necessarily perceptive judges of their troops’ responses to India. They often failed to realise that Africans in India were carefully analysing and evaluating what they saw around them. Upon arriving at Nasik, the Maharashtra town that was home to Masrul Camp, the soldiers “loved” what they found, “for there they could always buy ‘small ting,’ and savour the strange new sights (and smells) of India.”<sup>53</sup> They were quick to make comparisons, expressing “great discontent” when British and Indian troops were permitted to wear medals, and finding that they were prohibited from doing so.<sup>54</sup> As one East African military report put it “every time the askari comes in contact with Orientals he is learning something, and will not be slow in reacting to his advantage.”<sup>55</sup> In draft questions prepared for the visit of the Duke of Devonshire in 1945, one soldier “wishe[d] to know why, although Africans are fighting the same war as Europeans, Indians,

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Killingray “Fighting”, 246.

<sup>53</sup> RHO, mss.af.s.1734 (357), R Ryder, History of the 4th West African Auxiliary Group Sierra Leone Regiment, 1941–1945.

<sup>54</sup> TNA, WO 203/2268 Report on the morale of British, Indian, and Colonial Troops of Allied Land Force for the months of May, June, and July 1945.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, CO 820/55/3, Report on Welfare in 21st (EA) Infantry Brigade Welfare Economy and the Significance of Education among Askari serving in Ceylon, 23rd June 1943.

Chinese... they are given inferior food, pay, sleeping conditions.”<sup>56</sup> It was also clear that military discipline was ineffective in preventing all manner of contact between Indian civilians and African soldiers.

Fights over women, leading in isolated cases to murder, was relatively common once men returned from Burma. From Spring 1945, many West Africans were moved back to southern India to await demobilisation. Arguments about women soon came to represent a major source of contention with Indian civilians, particularly because court martials were often lenient on the culprits; an unknown number of Indian women were raped by British and American troops during the war.<sup>57</sup> As the numbers of Africans in India intensified in the final months of the war, so the problems grew worse. The RWAFF constructed special leave camps, in which Africans, who had not enjoyed leave until February of that year and were too far from home to return, could escape from some of the rigours of conventional barracks life. Two such barracks were concentrated on the Coromandel coast in Tamil Nadu, a few miles from Madras.<sup>58</sup> Here, local officials’ suspicions were piqued by the presence of African soldiers stationed nearby; in one case the Madras police took the officer based at a local barracks “for a rather grisly inspection of [a] corpse, half-eaten by wild creatures,” and “after much discussion ... decided that there is no evidence to connect any of our Africans with the crime.”<sup>59</sup> Suspicions were not so easily dispelled in other cases. In one dispute over a woman involving African soldiers and villagers near Karvetnagar in Tamil Nadu, a villager was left dead. In this case, the military was either unwilling or unable to identify the assailant and the accused soldier was acquitted. “It is difficult,” lamented a member of the Court-Martial, “to keep Africans out of Indian villages.”<sup>60</sup>

When we look at Africans’ ability to evade the military authorities, with some men absenting themselves for months at a time, we gain a very different picture from the blanket assertions made by British officers that an inseparable gulf existed between Africans and Indians. It is true that such

<sup>56</sup>TNA, CO 820/55/11 Duke of Devonshire’s visit to African troops in Burma and India, Proposed African questions for Duke of Devonshire, March 1945.

<sup>57</sup>Khan “Raj.” 149.

<sup>58</sup>RHO mss.af.s.1734 (357), Ryder, *History of the 4th West African Auxiliary Group, Sierra Leone Regiment*, 28 (f.39).

<sup>59</sup>IWM 03/23/1, Private Papers of Major J. J. Cherns; ‘A Walk Through the Valley’ manuscript, 111.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 112.

cases constituted an extreme minority, but they nonetheless illustrate extended interactions with Indians, and the incapacity of the British army to control the movements of African soldiers on the sub-continent. In the case of Karvetnagar, one problem with not being able to prevent Africans from visiting local villages was made dramatically clear when a local village was daubed with “Quit India” slogans. Referring to the massive popular resistance movement that ravaged India between 1943 and 1945, the slogans were part of the tail-end of a rising that proved difficult to entirely suppress.<sup>61</sup> In the case of African soldiers, the appearance of “Quit India” slogans intensified army attempts to prevent soldiers from visiting the village. On evaluating its success, a British officer candidly remarked that the measures had little effect because “Africans are not fools. They understood what ‘Quit India’ was about and Nigeria already has a thriving nationalist movement.”<sup>62</sup>

One account by South East Asia Command’s Indian Welfare Branch of Calcutta suggests relatively friendly interaction between Africans and Indians. “Passing through CALCUTTA the other week,” wrote one British official,

I saw a typical example of the African soldier at ease in a foreign city. Proceeding to the station was a large truck being pushed by numerous coolies and piled high with baggage. Surmounted on the top of the baggage was an African soldier in full equipment giving directions to all the coolies in no known language, but one which they appeared to understand, and the procession was proceeding very much as it would in Africa except that the African soldier there would be made to assist in the pushing and not ride on the top.<sup>63</sup>

SEAC’s publicity officer maintained that “far from being over-awed by India,” Africans had “maintained rather a fatherly relationship” with Indians; their main concern was that

they are extremely surprised and concerned over the fact that they see people whom they consider to be so very poor and who they think have very small appetites in comparison with their own rather large ones.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Misra, Maria. *Vishnu’s Crowded Temple: India since the Great Rebellion*. (London: Penguin, 2008), 221.

<sup>62</sup> IWM 03/23/1, Private Papers of Major J. J. Cherns, “A Walk,” p. 119.

<sup>63</sup> TNA, CO 820 55 3 Tadman to Rolleston, 5th February 1944.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, CO 820 55 3, Tadman to Rolleston, 5th February 1944.

“The African appears,” he continued,

completely at home wherever he goes, and when touring especially in the forward areas it is common to see an African driver with his lorry or jeep at the side of the road drinking tea or smoking cigarettes in an Indian shop and carrying on conversations with the local inhabitants in a mixture of English and Hindustani that they seem to have quickly picked up. A Brigade Commander told me that he was much amused at seeing a group of African soldiers waiting for a train surrounded by many coolies asking for “Baksheesh.” Finally, one of the Africans in a lordly way turned to the mob and placing his hand in his pockets drew out a few annas which he distributed amongst the scrambling mass.<sup>65</sup>

It must be stressed that British officers frequently lost control of individual Africans in India, sometimes for weeks at a time. Even the soldiers’ day to day habits suggest their confidence in Indian towns: “the African loves to sit about in the shops looking at all the goods displayed and generally coffee housing.”<sup>66</sup> One African clerk visited Lahore with another soldier to attend a Muslim festival apparently independent of any British supervision.<sup>67</sup> Due to “travel lust and for no reason other than to see the sights,” complained the SEAC publicity officer, “they quite often take ‘French’ leave and travel all over India on their own.” One dramatic case involved an African who was “discovered in Chunking having hopped a lift in an American plane,” while another two were found in the Khyber Pass.<sup>68</sup> All of this made the prospect of leaving India appear remote because “it will take a considerable period of time extracting them from all over this very vast country, not to mention the other countries adjoining India [into] which they seem to stray.”<sup>69</sup>

In other cases, soldiers’ interactions with Indians remain tantalisingly unclear. This is true of the October 1945 4 (WA) Auxiliary Group mutiny in Maharashtra. The soldiers had finished fighting in early 1945 and returned to India, passing through Karvetnagar, the village of the “Quit India” slogans, before moving to the rest camp at Ennur, with some soldiers completing a detachment in Bangalore.<sup>70</sup> The men had also spent

<sup>65</sup> TNA, CO 820 55 3, Tadman to Rolleston, 5th February 1944.

<sup>66</sup> TNA, CO 820 55 3, Tadman to Rolleston, 5th February 1944.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, CO 820 55 3, Tadman to Rolleston, 29th October 1944.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> RHO, mss.af.s.1734 (357) Ryder, Mutiny in India by Sierra Leone Troops of 4 (WA), Auxiliary Group, Autumn 1945.

time in Bombay, during which their commanding officers were unsure of their whereabouts.<sup>71</sup> In October 1945, “a heated discussion” blew up in the African canteen over “barb money”; this debate over a Haircut & Washing Allowance spiralled into a confrontation in which the barrack’s Acting Commanding Officer, Lt Col Holloway, was pursued by “some of the more vociferous of the Africans,” and “threatened, chased, and beaten.”<sup>72</sup> The RWAFF had to use other reluctant West African troops to secure the arsenal and restore order. Army officers were terrified by the brief rising and the fact that “there appeared to be no single overwhelming reason for the men’s actions.”<sup>73</sup> Although beyond the scope of the present chapter, the mutiny reflects both Africans’ initiative in being able to confront the inequalities (in this case racial discrimination) they found in the British army in Asia, and the lack of control, particularly in intellectual terms, experienced by the British. One semantic problem recurs in accounts of the mutiny, reflecting British paranoia, but also opening the potential for external influence. At one stage in the mutiny, recounted one official, “troops were heard to use the expression ‘Britisher’” a word outside the normal vocabulary of West African soldiers.<sup>74</sup>

We do not contend that the 1945 mutiny was solely or significantly connected to Indian influence, still less that it offered a programme of nationalist politics; rather, we can understand the mutiny as reflecting the potential of Indian intellectual influences, albeit mixed with far more direct causes such as pay inequality and frustration at army racism. Equally importantly, the official paranoia engendered by the rising suggests that African soldiers frequently enjoyed relative freedom in Indian cities, notwithstanding the fact that certain areas of Calcutta and Bombay were closed to soldiers of all races at varying times during the war.<sup>75</sup> “Britisher” was a frequent term in Indian nationalist discourse, but a soldier may just have easily gleaned this from a newspaper as from impassioned conversation with an Indian. In terms of intellectual influence, the distinction is hardly relevant, because both channels of influence would expose soldiers to new ideas. The complaints official voiced during the mutiny do not reflect such questions but instead focused on unfair pay, the popularity of a recently-suspended “staff

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> IWM 03/23/1, Private Papers of Major J. J. Cherns, “A Walk.”

parade.” In a telling comment, one officer at the barracks regretted that his colleagues did not see these seemingly small grievances as being “so serious,” perhaps leading to even greater grievances.<sup>76</sup> The event was not isolated; there had earlier been a rebellion of 81st West Africa Division soldiers at Dhond.<sup>77</sup>

Unrest amongst Africans increased dramatically as they faced the frustrating wait for ships back home; often these men were forced to watch their British comrades leave far earlier, triggering further anger. There were ten recorded offences among West Africans between August and October 1945, including one murder and one count of absence without leave, but many cases never came to the attention of the military authorities, with Africans preferring to “settle [matters] among themselves.”<sup>78</sup> Like the October 1945 Mutiny, the unrest involved violence, with “bricks [being] hurled, machetes drawn,” and “men [being] quite seriously hurt.”<sup>79</sup> As one official admitted, “I found myself at something of a loss to determine why [seemingly petty discontents] develop [into] such violence.”<sup>80</sup> The influence of Indians in any sense did not seem evident in most of these cases, with conflict likely arising from the soldiers’ belonging to different ethnic groups.<sup>81</sup>

### “A GREAT MASS OF CONSUMERS”: NEW FOODS AND COMMODITIES

Unlike colonial Africa, where consumption was constrained, particularly in relation to objects such as alcohol and cosmetics, soldiers in Asia enjoyed a relatively unrestrained selection over the gamut of materials supplied by the British Army, or were available for purchase in local towns.<sup>82</sup> Those constraints that Africans did encounter were likely to be

<sup>76</sup> RHO, mss.af.s.1734 (357), Ryder, Responses to Questionnaire.

<sup>77</sup> Killingray “Fighting,” 133.

<sup>78</sup> TNA WO 203/ 6288, Morale Reports, Report on the Morale of British, Indian and Colonial Troops of Allied Land Forces, South East Asia for the months of August, September, and October 1945; IWM 03/23/1, Private Papers of Major J. J. Cherns, “A Walk,” p. 115.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*. (Durham: Duke University Press 1996), 101.

based more in personal finance, than in any ideological control or restriction; thanks to the presence of highly paid American troops and wartime inflation, food and drink in wartime India were considerably more expensive than in Africa.<sup>83</sup>

This introduction to new ways of living was so extensive that many British observers feared it would irrevocably heighten Africans' expectations. "In my view," one official worried, "there is a little danger that the African may be inclined to look in the years to come to Governments to act the part the Army has played as a sort of 'Fairy Godmother.'"<sup>84</sup> There could not have been a starker contrast with the African colonies from which the men came, where social welfare provision at this time was almost non-existent and the range of new commodities available to Africans was controlled "with gusto" by the colonial authorities, even before the introduction of wartime controls and rationing.<sup>85</sup> In the words of one recent history of the African contribution to the war, the "army provided a new and altogether unusual welfare umbrella."<sup>86</sup>

A barrage of novel experiences faced soldiers from the day they embarked on the troop transport ships from West Africa to India. They had been inducted into a world where "daily life" had been "transformed and reordered" at every level by military discipline.<sup>87</sup> In contrast to the later proliferation of material goods, life on-board ship was strictly regulated and "lamps, musical instruments, bags and such like" were frowned upon by officers who worried at the sight of African soldiers coming aboard with pockets "bulging with odds and ends of rubbish."<sup>88</sup> They had reason to be worried as "there [was] little previous experience of transporting large bodies of African troops by sea out of their normal climate."<sup>89</sup> Even sight of the seas "amazed" many Africans who had never imagined its scale.<sup>90</sup> The experience was not always a happy one as one soldier, Adediran, described in his article for the *West African Pilot* how "many

<sup>83</sup> Khan "Raj", 151.

<sup>84</sup> TNA CO 820 55 3, Collins to Rolleston.

<sup>85</sup> Burke "Lifebuoy", 101.

<sup>86</sup> Killingray "Fighting", 83.

<sup>87</sup> Parsons "Rank", 104.

<sup>88</sup> TNA WO 173769 6 NR Mob Instruction No 10, 23rd September 1943.

<sup>89</sup> IWM 03/23/1, Private Papers of Major J. J. Cherns, "A Walk," p. 21.

<sup>90</sup> RHO mss.af.s.1734 (357), R Ryder, 'History of the 4th West African Auxiliary Group,' p. 6.

[soldiers] vomited and bec[a]me seasick and many refused chop.”<sup>91</sup> Some men encountered graver maladies while onboard and “respiratory illnesses” were particularly acute on the voyage to India.<sup>92</sup>

For all its tedium and misery, the voyage proved an opportunity to purchase new objects, and sometimes to sell them on to Indians. In South Africa, despite the racially motivated movement restrictions demanded by the South African government, soldiers managed to visit Cape Town and Durban, “immediately raiding the shops,” and patronising department stores such as Durban’s Stuttafords.<sup>93</sup> Even if they had no money with which to make purchases, Africans received ample entertainment from these edifices of interwar consumerism, particularly with their escalators, which attracted riders to go “up and down time after time, laughing and shouting to their friends going in the opposite direction.”<sup>94</sup> The mainly illiterate men were apparently unaware of glaring signs reading “white only” throughout the store; in any case they “paid not the slightest heed to the local rules about segregation.”<sup>95</sup> Wristwatches “were very popular” with Africans and “several were to be sold to Indians later ... at a profit.”<sup>96</sup> “It is the delight of most Africans,” opined another officer, “to possess wrist-watches, fountain pens, and other insignia of civilisation”; officers and British Non-Commissioned Officers were frequently asked to purchase such objects for Africans.<sup>97</sup>

The soldiers soon discovered an array of material goods that most could barely have envisaged. Cumulatively they turned into a “great mass of consumers,” with many eating with plates, mugs, tins, cutlery, tables, and chairs for the first time.<sup>98</sup> For soldiers from outside Lagos and other urban areas, bread was a novelty, as was tinned meat, and tea.<sup>99</sup> Africans were often given British army rations in India, while in Burma American rations were air-dropped to hull top supply points.<sup>100</sup> Soldiers who did not understand British ration packs mixed corned beef

<sup>91</sup> ‘Nigerian Soldier Describes Journey to India,’ *Nigerian Daily Times*, 31st January 1944.

<sup>92</sup> TNA, CO/820/55/3, *Welfare of Colonial Troops*, Tadman to Rolleston, 14.9.44.

<sup>93</sup> RHO, mss.afr.s.1960, Hibbert Papers, ‘Nigerians in South Africa and India’.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> IWM 80/49/1, Crafrae, p. 87.

<sup>97</sup> IWM 03/23/1, *Private Papers of Major J. J. Cherns*, “A Walk.”

<sup>98</sup> Killingray “Fighting,” 93.

<sup>99</sup> Killingray “Fighting,” 93.

<sup>100</sup> IWM 97/2/1, *Private Papers of Captain F.C. Davies*, 68.

and fruit salad.<sup>101</sup> Even in the harsh conditions of the Burmese front, these American rations were modified by British officers to deprive Africans of fruit and butter, on the pretext that they would not “appreciate” them.<sup>102</sup> These modifications made the Africans still received tinned potatoes, soup, and spam. The novelty of changing ration packs was in itself a challenge; “most ... Africans, after putting to one side the chocolate, cigarettes, and toilet paper, consumed the edible items only after they had mixed them all together.”<sup>103</sup>

The range of fruit in South Asia led to debate between British and African soldiers. In Chittagong on New Year’s Eve 1945, the arrival of the rations included a number of Indian grown specimens, this provoked fierce debate between the two different groups of soldiers over who was entitled to consume the fruit. The Nigerians contended that, contrary to British scepticism, they regularly enjoyed apples, and that varieties of apple in fact grew world in Nigeria.<sup>104</sup> Unfortunately we do not know the outcome of the debate. Although we should not imagine that West Africans were unfamiliar with all of the foods they encountered, novelties such as Australian cheese and sweetened condensed milk were soon popular.<sup>105</sup>

We have already seen Africans’ excitement at the tea houses of urban India, and this enthusiasm reached inside their barracks. An African canteen on the Arakan Road sold 4000 mugs of tea ever evening, alongside “vast quantities of tea and cakes,” with some men bringing petrol tins and water bottles to fill with tea to take back to their accommodation.<sup>106</sup> One group of Gold Coast soldiers disembarking in Africa after the war was issued with a special ration pack containing milk, tea, and sugar as a final present from their commanding officer.<sup>107</sup>

Alcohol consumption had a venerable history in the southern regions of British West Africa, with colonial governments repeatedly struggling to control illicit beverages.<sup>108</sup> But serving in South Asia deprived many men of a staple pleasure: palm wine. Bizarrely, this shortage was one that was

<sup>101</sup> RHO mss.af.s.1734 (55) Terence W Bonser, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> IWM 97/2/1, Davies, 69.

<sup>104</sup> IWM 97/2/1, Davies, p. 65.

<sup>105</sup> IWM 03/23/1, Private Papers of Major J. J. Cherns, “A Walk,”.

<sup>106</sup> TNA, CO 820 55 3 Tadman to Rolleston, 29 10 44.

<sup>107</sup> RHO mss.af.s.1734 (61), Breadmore papers.

<sup>108</sup> Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampompong. *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol Inghana, C.1800 to Recent Times*. (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), 111.

recognised by even the most myopic of observers, such as the British army official who lamented that “women and palm-wine are [the Africans’] main pleasures in life, and in India he is deprived of both.”<sup>109</sup> Palm wine might have been in short supply, but army canteens readily sold bottled beer.<sup>110</sup> As Nigerian soldier Christopher Adediran informed the readers of his newspaper article back in Africa:

[W]e are allowed to go to the nearest town and buy anything we require, including local made drinks, which are much stronger than our drinks in Nigeria.<sup>111</sup>

Another officer remembered that one African soldier used to order half a pint of alcohol daily “to keep out the cold” of India.<sup>112</sup> Cigarettes were also popular with the African soldiers, even though they tended to be lower quality brands such as Lion and Neptune.<sup>113</sup> The range, quantity, and quality of the food on supply in the army meant that, as one Welfare Office from GHQ India observed, “all the Africans without exception say that they have never been better fed in their lives.”<sup>114</sup>

This array of new commodities and technologies did not simply provide a novel gamut of choice; it structured the substantial amount of leisure time that soldiers enjoyed while stationed away from the fighting. Military authorities experimented in showing films to the soldiers with mobile cinema units that were based in military camps. “Western” and “knock-about comedies” were popular with African soldiers, according to one British army morale report, which approvingly claimed that the Africans had “no interest in the degenerate dialogue of the sophisticated film.”<sup>115</sup> More edifying fare was also available including “invariably out of date” newsreels imported from Britain, but the whole network of cinemas was threatened by a shortage of film projects until a new supply was obtained from the United States in 1944.<sup>116</sup> Radio programmes were “very popular” with

<sup>109</sup> TNA, WO 203, 6288, Report on Morale, August September October 1944.

<sup>110</sup> Killingray “Fighting”, 103.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Nigerian Soldier Describes Journey to India,’ Nigerian Daily Times, 31st January 1944.

<sup>112</sup> IWM 97/2/1, Davies, p. 85.

<sup>113</sup> TNA, WO 203/2268, Draft Morale Report 22 2 46.

<sup>114</sup> TNA, CO 820/55/3, Tadman to Rolleston, 29 10 44.

<sup>115</sup> TNA, WO 203/2268, Draft Morale Report 22 2 46.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, CO 820/55/3, Tadman to Rolleston Public Relations Services WAEF, May 1944.

the soldiers but needed to be flown in from Africa on very fragile glass records because the GC transmitter “ZOY Accra” was not audible in India.<sup>117</sup> Jugglers, magicians, and visiting bands also entertained the soldiers, although sometimes their repertoire was based on generic British assumptions about music that might be popular with Africans; the West Kent Regiment Band played music by Coleridge Taylor alongside “Georgia [and] St Louis Blues” to Nigerian troops.<sup>118</sup> Impressive thought they were, many of these amenities varied considerably between camps. They improved considerably during 1945 and into 1946, while entertainment opportunities for West Africans in 1944 were deemed “inadequate.”<sup>119</sup>

### INDIA: A WHOLE WORLD COMPACTED INTO MILITARY SERVICE

Africans’ in wartime India enjoyed many activities that have fallen outside the scope of our current discussion. Education, intellectual analysis of India, affective bonds between Africans, the leisure opportunities of the barracks, and Indians, and Africans’ experiences of the fighting itself all represent subjects for further exploration. But what have we learnt from our two examples of contact between Indians and Africans, and the array of new commodities and materials suddenly available to military service? Historians of World War II and Africa have long posited the war’s collective broadening of horizons, intellectually, politically, technologically, and materially as a key impact of the global conflict. Discussing rural Bechuanaland, Jackson argues that the war “exposed rural Africans to unprecedented levels of information from Bechuanaland and the wider world.”<sup>120</sup> The point might just as easily be made of West Africans, both in terms of the “home front” and military service overseas. Yet this transformative impact of the war is rarely analysed in any detail, save for studies of internal social and political change that might have been accelerated or altered by the war. Thus, Byfield correctly observes that “the new importance ... [of] the war effort was not lost on the men and women who were

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> TNA, WO 203/2268 Report on the morale of British, Indian, and Colonial Troops of Allied Land Force for the months of August, September and October 1945; ‘Nigerian Troops Thrilled by Music’ *Daily Comet*, 29th March 1945.

<sup>119</sup> TNA, WO 203/2268, Report on the morale of British Indian and Colonial Troops of Allied Land Force for the months of August, September October 1944.

<sup>120</sup> Jackson “Botswana”, 120.

put in the position of sacrificing their lives ... to give others in Europe the freedoms that they did not enjoy.”<sup>121</sup> But precisely how this awareness of sacrifice came about, specifically with regard to African soldiers overseas, remains obscure, as do the precise contours of the soldiers’ encounter with the “wider world.” If “scarcely a level of life, both material and less tangible... was not fundamentally affected” by the war, as Rathbone and Killingray contend, then understanding the way in which Africans’ responded to India, and the new foods and materials they encountered begins to flesh out this transformation both in tangible terms, such as the crate of Indian apples argued over by the soldiers, and in intangible terms, such as the troubling appearance of the word “Britisher” in the October mutiny in Western India.

More substantively, understanding the outlines of Africans’ travels in India and their relations with local people helps us comprehend how ordinary Africans entered an international world at war. Many men who had not left their immediate locality were plunged into contact with, and awareness of, British, East African, Indian, African American, Burmese, and Japanese soldiers. That this contact was still more direct, if less structured, at the front itself, is a fascinating possibility, sadly outside the purview of this chapter. While we find verbiage about idle and “complacent” Indians in the sources, we also gain fascinating insights into Africans’ own analysis of another area of what today we term the “global South.” The soldier who acquired basic Hindi or who expressed his surprise at the Indian beggars provides us moments of African/Asian cultural contact that are largely absent from the colonial archives. But India left its mark in less direct ways too; it is hard to imagine unlearning to wear shoes, or forgetting how to drive a lorry or erasing the enjoyment of a strong beer.

So, what was the influence of India on West African soldiers? It is not possible to answer this question in the singular, but instead necessary to look at influences both large and small. An interest in political nationalism was a response for a minority of servicemen; but many more were frustrated at the legion of shortcomings over pay, shipping, and casual discrimination that framed military life. In this chapter, we have deliberately set our sights on more localised and quotidian encounters with India; partly this has been in order to challenge sweeping assertions about the popularity of an unspecified nationalism among soldiers. While they are less dramatic, we would contend that they are more representative and

<sup>121</sup> Byfield “Preface”, xviii.

significant indicators of overseas service than the minority of literate soldiers interested in nationalism. India, thus, had seemingly more modest, but no less far-reaching consequences for a whole host of Africans. For some Gold Coast troops, it meant returning home with the essential elements to make a cup of tea; for Babatunde Sule, it meant meeting a relative he had not seen for years. India meant hitching a ride in an American plane for one soldier, while for another it was the discovery that corned beef and fruit salad were edible when mixed together. For the mutineers in October 1945, it meant finally having the possibility to hit one's Commanding Officer over the head. In all of these cases, India gave Africans space to challenge the restrictions of colonial African society, and to profit from the unique possibilities present in an often poorly administered, resource rich, wartime world of foods, peoples, and commodities.

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## CHAPTER 10

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# A Colonizing Agricultural Company in Somalia: The Duke of Abruzzi's *Società Agricola Italo-Somala* in the Italian Colonial Fascist System

*Alberto Cauli*

## INTRODUCTION

Italian colonialism had its core in the Horn of Africa, where three of the four Italian colonies were located: Eritrea, Ethiopia (which became a colony in 1936), and Somalia. Libya was considered the Fourth Shore (*Quarta Sponda*) of Italy because of its proximity to the Italian peninsula. Somalia was quite different from the other Italian possessions. Up to the outbreak of the First World War, it was a quiet territory where uprisings were not as frequent as in the other colonies, “partly because the Somali, unlike the Libyans and Ethiopians, did not have easy access to European

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weapons”.<sup>1</sup> Despite its peaceful situation, Somalia remained somewhat undeveloped in terms of infrastructure to facilitate trade and job opportunities. Furthermore, there were no private investors who could support the commercial development of the colony, and no settlers to populate it. By the end of 1921, only 656 Italians lived in Somalia, representing the lowest percentage of Italian inhabitants in the four colonies,<sup>2</sup> despite the fact that since the very beginning of its control, the Italian government had focused on attracting settlers from Italy to develop colonial plantations along the Shebelle and Juba rivers.<sup>3</sup> The awareness that Somalia was the most backward among the Italian colonies emerged even at the Colonial Congress of Roma in 1919, which gathered politicians and supporters of colonialism to discuss the Italian colonial situation in the aftermath of the Great War. The convention emphasized the fundamental importance of the Shebelle river to the Italian colonial programme, which was based on an extensive farming plan to be developed along the river’s banks. Thus, at the *Congresso Coloniale*, the need emerged to explore the Uebi-Scebeli river as it was still almost completely unknown in its upper and middle sectors. A possible remedy for this situation was to undertake scientific studies on Somalia’s lakes and rivers in order to develop agricultural and navigation projects.<sup>4</sup> The congress also focused on the general disorganization of Somalia, highlighting its semi-anarchic situation.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of the 1920s, Italy actually controlled only the coastal areas surrounding Benadir, although since 1889 it had held a protectorate over the sultanates of Mijjertein (Migiurtinia) and Hobyo (Obbia), respectively, located in the north and south of Italian Somaliland.

The rise of fascism brought some changes in Italian colonial policy because Mussolini’s regime reinforced the state’s presence and its commitment to the colonies. For example, the government’s dedication to Genale became stronger than that of the pre-fascist administration, especially during the governorship of Cesare Maria De Vecchi. The experimental

<sup>1</sup> R. Bosworth and G. Finaldi, “The Italian Empire,” in *Empires at War: 1911–1923*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and Manela Erez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall’Unità alla marcia su Roma*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Milano: Mondadori, 2001), 867.

<sup>3</sup> Ioan M. Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali. Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*, 4 ed. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 92.

<sup>4</sup> Del Boca, 1. 868.

<sup>5</sup> Giampaolo Calchi Novati, “Studi e politica ai convegni coloniali del Primo e del Secondo Dopoguerra,” *Il Politico* 55, no. 3 (1990), 503.

farming project pursued by Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, the Duke at the *Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi* in Jowhar planned to start cultivation of cotton, sugarcane, corn, oilseeds, and bananas. Although the *Società Agricola Italo-Somala* (SAIS) was almost a coexisting “counterpart” of the government farming consortium at Genale,<sup>6</sup> ruled by the colonial government since its foundation in 1912, the regime’s propaganda praised the Duke’s colonizing programme and his *Società*. Fascism depicted Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta as an icon of fascist colonial policy. It “appropriated the experience of SAIS” to exploit it in terms of colonial propaganda.<sup>7</sup> This chapter retraces how the Duke’s agricultural society impacted on Somalia and Somalis.

### THE DUKE OF ABRUZZI COMES TO SOMALIA

In December 1893, the Duke of Abruzzi was a naval officer on the Italian gunboat *Volturno*, which the Italian government sent to Benadir’s shores to support the Italian Royal Navy ship *Staffetta* in suppressing an uprising that had occurred in the city of Merca.<sup>8</sup> The Bimal clan had triggered a riot against Italian domination and prevented the Italian commercial company *Compagnia Filonardi*<sup>9</sup> succeeding the Zanzibar sultan in the administration of the Benadir territory, as a pre-existing agreement between Italy and the sultan had envisaged. Italians bombed the Somali area of Merca to force the Bimal to surrender, but the situation degenerated and the Italian Navy lieutenant Maurizio Talmone was killed.<sup>10</sup> Once the military mission

<sup>6</sup> In 1910, the government appointed the Italian agronomist Romolo Onor as agricultural consultant for Somalia. Onor carried out several experimental studies on the agricultural potential of Somalia, which helped to establish the *Azienda Sperimentale di Genale* along the Uebi-Shebeli river in 1912. Loredana Polezzi, “Description, Appropriation, Transformation: Fascist Rhetoric and Colonial Nature,” *Modern Italy* 19, no. 3 (2014), 293. Onor’s work was part of the government colonial programme to promote agriculture in Somalia. Del Boca, 1, 830.

<sup>7</sup> Polezzi, 294.

<sup>8</sup> Ufficio Storico Marina Militare, Roma, “Nave Volturno”, busta 2256, Rapporto di Navigazione. Henceforth USMM.

<sup>9</sup> At that time the sultan of Zanzibar ruled over the Benadir region. In 1886, he signed a treaty with the merchant Vincenzo Filonardi, who later would establish the *Compagnia Filonardi*, to acquire the rights to the Somali harbours of Merca, Kisimayo, Mogadishu, and Brava. In 1889, Filonardi was also able to sign treaties with the sultans of Obbia and Mijjertein, which appointed Italy as protector of those territories. See in Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia Dell’Espansione Coloniale Italiana* (Bologna, Italia: il Mulino, 2002), 88.

<sup>10</sup> Clelia Maino, *La Somalia e l’opera del Duca degli Abruzzi* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa, 1959), 65–66.

ended, the Duke of Abruzzi visited inland Somalia and the cities of the Benadir region. This was his first contact with the Italian colony. Although the *Volturno*'s mission took only a few days, his commander Ruelle gave a detailed description of the situation of the colony and Somalia in a confidential report on the mission addressed to the Minister of the Navy. This report clearly stated Italy's weak rule over those territories and Italian disregard for the Somalis. Ruelle emphasized the precariousness of the *Compagnia Filonardi*'s control of the colony, describing the possession of Benadir as a serious task for Italy because new turmoil could arise at any time. He also specified that Benadir could be much more profitable in terms of commerce and agriculture compared with Eritrea, because of the fertility of the land and the abundance of cattle.

However, export of inland products was difficult because of the inadequacy of the region's ports for cargo vessels. Goods carried to the coastal cities could be stocked only on small piers, until the government built appropriate harbours. Ruelle suggested using Italian manpower to cultivate the land and transport the products, because he considered Somali to be "lazy, nomads and they think that farming work is a job for slaves". Italian immigrants could be chosen from among those who "are annually leaving Italy". Furthermore, he recommended that the newcomers "never merge with the natives, [Italians] have to totally replace the locals. [Somali] must be driven to the extreme borders of the inland [areas]". The report ended by pointing out that: "We have to be sure that our immigrants could peacefully live and work in those lands even before they leave Italy, without risk of being assaulted or defeated by the locals". In doing so, the "company must be strong and solid both to defend lives and offer jobs. I believe, instead, that only the 'name' of the company and Mr. Filonardi himself are here".<sup>11</sup>

The Duke of Abruzzi turned his attention to agriculture after being dismissed from the rank of commander-in-chief of the Italian Navy in the Adriatic Sea in 1917.<sup>12</sup> Historians also report another reason that con-

<sup>11</sup> USMM, "Nave Volturno", Missione lungo la costa del Benadir, 1 December 1983, pp. 12–13, busta 2256.

<sup>12</sup> As General Enrico Caviglia reported in his diary, the Duke was removed from office because of a disagreement he had with Camillo Corsi, who was his chief of staff. The Duke sent a letter to Admiral Leone Viale, who was the Minister of the Navy at that time, asking for Corsi to be dismissed. However, Viale was forced to resign because of incidents that

vinced the Duke to leave Italy: for dynastic reasons the Queen Mother, Margherita of Savoia, actively discouraged the Duke from marrying Kathrin Elkins, the daughter of an American senator in West Virginia.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in September 1918, after assembling a team of a few technicians and agronomists (including Giuseppe Scassellati-Sforzolini, one of the most competent agronomists at the *Istituto Agricolo Coloniale* of Florence),<sup>14</sup> The Duke of Abruzzi returned to Somalia, where he spent five months touring the whole colony. The experts studied the flow rate of the Uebi-Scebeli river and analysed the land in order to identify which areas could be best cultivated. The explorative mission was part of the Duke's wider project to found an experimental farming colony by creating an ad hoc agricultural society. In 1919, the Duke presented his plan to Luigi Rossi, the Minister for the Colonies. The future farming company would have reclaimed the land surrounding the region of the Middle Shebelle, near the current Jowhar village on the Uebi-Scebeli river. The area was 120 kilometres from Mogadishu, could be easily irrigated using the river and was inhabited by a large Somali clan who had farmed the land for a long time.<sup>15</sup>

Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta strongly believed that industrial farming development in Somalia was possible only if the government dedicated much more attention to the specific needs of the colony. He supported the idea that private investors with their own assets could contribute to the development of the rural areas of the colony,<sup>16</sup> and prioritized the actions that the government had to undertake to ensure the establishment of a farming company in Somalia:

occurred involving two Italian warships at the same time. Thus, Corsi became the new Minister of the Navy. He found the Duke's letter and instead dismissed him. Enrico Caviglia, *Diario. Aprile 1925–Marzo 1945* (Roma: Gherardo Casini Editore, 1952), 113–114.

<sup>13</sup>R. Bosworth, J., B., *Mussolini's Italy. Life under the Dictatorship 1915–1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), 375 and Del Boca, I. 870.

<sup>14</sup>Ferdinando Bigi, Ugo Funaioli, and Vasco Gatti, *L'opera della Società Agricola Italo Somala in Somalia. Significato e valore delle realizzazioni, delle esperienze e degli studi compiuti dalla S.A.I.S. nei suoi 44 anni di vita* (Firenze: Società Agricola Italo Somala, 1970), vii.

<sup>15</sup>Del Boca, I. 870.

<sup>16</sup>Fondazione Sella onlus, Biella. Courtesy Fondazione Sella onlus, Biella, Fondo Vittorio Sella. Serie Patrimoniale - Affari, m.1, f.1, "Relazione Somalia", IV parte, 1919-1920, p. 1.

La questione monetaria nella Somalia Italiana oggi è tale da rendere impossibile lo sviluppo di una azienda agricola [Mi riferisco] alla mancanza di moneta nella Colonia [...] L'indigeno che lavora in Colonia deve essere pagato giornalmente. La Società deve perciò essere sicura di trovare, in primo tempo, presso il governo, o presso qualche Istituto bancario, la moneta del paese necessaria per far fronte ai pagamenti [...] È necessario perciò [...] mettere in circolazione una sufficiente quantità di valuta argentea o cartacea, quest'ultima che venga però accolta favorevolmente dagli indigeni, e che si apra ufficialmente la succursale della Banca d'Italia [...] Il perdurare di questa situazione è un disastro morale ed economico per il Governo e per i privati.<sup>17</sup>

The existing financial issues in Somalia make it impossible to establish a farm. [I refer to] the lack of currency within the Colony [...] the natives who work in the Colony have to be paid daily. The Society has to be able to make these payments and find the necessary currency of the country through the government or some bank [...] It is necessary to issue a sufficient amount of currency in silver coins or notes as long as the natives accept such form of money; it is also essential to open a *Banca d'Italia* branch [...] The persistence of this situation is a moral and economic disaster both for the government and private investors.

The Duke considered the currency matter one of the main problems that had to be solved. The government had also failed to provide harbour infrastructure, road maintenance, and a telegraphic network. Regarding the condition of the roads, the Duke highlighted their fundamental importance to link the fertile agricultural inland regions to the harbours, from which all farm produce had to be exported.<sup>18</sup> He also aimed to establish a new agricultural system, based on the foundation of a private company to exploit the Somali lands. According to the situation presented by the Duke to the government, his future society would benefit from governmental preferential treatment, including land concessions, special rates for water usage to irrigate the land, exemption from government bonds pending on the lands, and transfer to the company from the government of some surplus war equipment, such as tractors, which would be useful for agricultural work.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp. 2–3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 3. Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta pointed out that the roads needed maintenance, especially during the rainy season, as the heavy rains destroyed some of them.

## THE FOUNDATION OF THE SOCIETÀ AGRICOLA ITALO-SOMALA: SAIS

In the aftermath of the Scebeli river valley expedition, the Duke searched for the necessary assets to found his company, which was officially named *Società Agricola Italo-Somala* (Italian-Somali Agricultural Society) or SAIS. He portrayed the explored area of Somalia as fertile, especially in those regions near the two main rivers of the Italian colony: the Giuba and the Scebeli. However, although the Giuba was bigger than the Scebeli, the Duke considered the area surrounding the Scebeli as a more suitable place to establish his farming village in terms of costs:

Nel 1919 mi sono fermato sullo Scebeli avendo constatato che maggiori erano sul Giuba le difficoltà da superare nella costruzione di opere fluviali data la sua maggiore portata. Lo stesso dicasi per la mano d'opera, di cui si richiederebbe, per la messa in valore del Giuba, una quantità rilevante. Perciò il problema del Giuba [...] non può essere tentato che mediante l'opera di Società provviste di mezzi molto più grandi di quelli che dovrebbe impiegare una costituenda Società per la messa in valore delle terre nello Scebeli.<sup>19</sup>

In 1919, we decided on the Scebeli because I understood that building a dam, embankments and digging the irrigation channels was harder on the Giuba, because of its flowrate, than on the Scebeli. Enhancing the Giuba required more manpower than the Scebeli to carry out the same works. Only Societies with great financial resources can cooperate to achieve the Giuba's improvement, while a Society would need fewer resources to improve the Scebeli flowrate.<sup>20</sup>

His project was mainly financed by the major Italian banks, including the *Banco di Roma*, *Banca Commerciale Italiana*, *Banca Italiana di Sconto*, and *Credito Italiano*. These banks and the Duke himself, as the President, also formed the financial promotion committee of the society.<sup>21</sup> The *Banco di Roma* was the most important backer of the SAIS. It sponsored the new

<sup>19</sup> "La Conferenza di S.A.R. il Duca degli Abruzzi," *La Perseveranza*, 10 Settembre 1920, 2.

<sup>20</sup> To exploit the Scebeli river's flowrate for agricultural purposes, a dam needed to be built to divert the water into secondary and service channels to bring it to the parcels of fertile land, where the farming village was to be established.

<sup>21</sup> Archivio Storico Unicredit-Banca di Roma, Milano, "Agricola Italo-Somala", busta VIII.2.1.22.21, ottobre 1920. Henceforth ASUBR.

firm with 1,000,000 Lire (approximately € 1,123,000).<sup>22</sup> It was a very significant amount of money, despite the international economic crisis prevailing at that time. In November 1920, the SAIS was officially established in Milan and the Duke of Abruzzi was appointed as its first chairman. According to its statute, the company had a corporate headquarters and an administrative office located respectively in Mogadishu and Milan. The purposes of the SAIS were enhancing the Scidle region, located along the Uebi-Scebeli river; turning the existing cultivations into industrial farming production, able to support the Mother Country with Somali products and eventually developing those lands; building and then renting or selling any real estate; and undertaking commercial, industrial, and financing operation related to the enhancement of the Scidle region. The company was intended to exist until 31 December 1970, unless a general meeting of the Society decided to extend its duration.<sup>23</sup>

Between 1921 and 1923, the SAIS built the essential structures for the future farming village, which was named *Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi* or *Villabruzzo*, in honour of the Duke of Abruzzi, and on 14 June 1922, the village was officially inaugurated.<sup>24</sup> The Scebeli river underwent hydraulic adjustments to irrigate the first parcels of land. The first aim of the SAIS was to cultivate 6000 hectares of the 16,000 hectares of available land, allocating the remaining space for zootechnic and livestock purposes, in agreement with the agronomic project carried out by Giuseppe Scassellati-Sforzolini during the 1918–1919 expedition.<sup>25</sup> The Duke intended to build the most important farming colony that Italy had ever possessed. He conceived the colony as a modern independent village with a hospital, a Catholic church and a mosque, schools, a hotel, a cinema, a post office, a bazaar, a pharmacy, a meteorological station, and two different graveyards (Catholic and Muslim).<sup>26</sup> The SAIS focused on planting: (a) cotton to be exported, (b) sugarcane and tobacco in initial quantities relating to local needs, and (c) corn and sesame to feed the Somali who inhabited the rural district. The area was divided into big farms and then into small parcels,

<sup>22</sup> ASUBR, “Agricola Italo-Somala”, Comitato Esecutivo 1920, Verbale Comitato Direttivo, 17 settembre 1920, pp. 18–19.

<sup>23</sup> ASUBR, “Agricola Italo-Somala”, busta VIII.2.1.22.21, Statuto Società Agricola Italo Somala, Capitolo I, pp. 3–4.

<sup>24</sup> Maino, 87.

<sup>25</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Maino, 89.

where groups of workers were gathered according to the location of their hometown. This approach was believed to be necessary to avoid unrest among workers from different tribes or villages.

Once the farming production was under way, the Duke dealt with the problem of transporting the outputs from Villabruzzi to Mogadishu, the closest port, 113 kilometres away. The area lacked a railway, which would have been the fastest way to transport the goods to the coastal regions. The Duke asked the colonial government to link the village to the existing railway. In 1924, Somalia had only 29 kilometres of railway, from the coastal area to the Afgoi village (which was the junction point inland, near the Uebi-Scebeli river). In January 1927, the government approved the Duke's request and on 15 September a new railway line joined the *Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi* with the existing railway.<sup>27</sup> Such infrastructure became essential to move the huge quantity of SAIS's outputs. From the beginning of its operations until 1927, the SAIS carried 350,000 quintals of materials and goods using camels, trucks and boats, which the SAIS specifically adapted for sailing the Uebi-Scebeli river. These data aided understanding of the work of the company in the colonizing project. No other companies had moved such a quantity of materials and outputs as those managed by the SAIS.<sup>28</sup>

### THE SAIS AND THE SOMALIS: THE AGREEMENTS WITH THE LOCAL POPULATIONS FOR THE LANDS

Once the Duke's expedition identified the most suitable area for establishing the consortium, his technicians analysed the land and studied the rural populations who inhabited those territories. In this survey, the agronomist Scassellati-Sforzolini counted the existing villages, identified which ethnic groups lived there, and divided the collected data in terms of age, gender, and other demographic factors. The survey focused both on territories chosen to establish the experimental farming colony and on those that could be included later within the area of the consortium.<sup>29</sup> The purpose

<sup>27</sup> Stefano Maggi, "Le Ferrovie nell'Africa Italiana: Aspetti economici, sociali e strategici," in *Nineteenth century transport history. Current trends and new problems*. (Fiesole, Istituto Universitario Europeo, 1994), 9–10.

<sup>28</sup> Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Milano: Mondadori, 2001), 85.

<sup>29</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, 28.

of the survey was to conduct a census of the population to understand how much manpower these tribes could supply both for the preparative works, such as reclaiming the land, tillage and deforestation, and for the proper agricultural works that would succeed the initial setup phase. Scasselati-Sforzolini's work emphasized that availability of the necessary local manpower was the main problem facing the future company. His survey confirmed that employing indigenous workers had always been a serious problem for Italian colonizers.<sup>30</sup> The survey's results counted 23,000 people divided into 49 villages, but only 1800 of them lived within the area of the potential land claim and were also farmers.<sup>31</sup>

The next step was how to obtain the land for establishing the consortium. The Duke based his idea on a mutual collaboration between Italians and Somalis: the Italians would supply the necessary capital and technical direction of the works, while Somalis would supply the manpower. The Duke of Abruzzi clearly stated his intention: "The land remains the property of the indigenous tribes and the society has a joint participation with them as well as investing a large amount of money to redeem and cultivate it".<sup>32</sup> This represented a real innovation in the Italian colonial system, as the society had directly received the land from the tribes by signing treaties, rather than receiving it from the government, as the other Italian concessionaires did. The Duke needed to establish cordial relations with the local chiefs to negotiate the joint concession of the lands on a long-term basis.<sup>33</sup>

The treaty for land possession included two agreements elaborated by the Duke himself: the *patto* (pact) and the *vincolo* (commitment). The first stated that Somalis contributed via their manpower to the hydraulic works along the Uebi-Scebeli river. The controlled flow rate guaranteed advantages for the villages located both within and outside the reclaimed lands. This statement justified the existence of the *patto*. The *vincolo* specified that those who signed the agreement with the society could not sign similar treaties with other companies. With this provision, the SAIS became

<sup>30</sup> Labanca, 318.

<sup>31</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, 29.

<sup>32</sup> Fondazione Sella onlus, Biella. Courtesy Fondazione Sella onlus, Biella, Fondo Vittorio Sella. Serie Patrimoniale - Affari, m.1, f.1, "Relazione Somalia", IV parte, 1919-1920, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Donatella Strangio, *The Reasons for Underdevelopment. The Case of Decolonization in Somaliland* (Berlin: Physica - Verlag, 2012), 77.

the exclusive recipient of the lands, acquiring approximately 30,000 hectares for the duration of the treaty, enabling it to plan its activities on a long-term basis.<sup>34</sup> In addition to these agreements, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta reinforced the rights of the SAIS regarding the territories located on the left bank of the Uebi-Shebéli by acquiring those lands directly from the Somalis. This was another innovation by the SAIS, which became the new owner of 16,000 hectares previously the property of 20,000 Somalis.<sup>35</sup>

These aspects impacted on colonial Somalia: through the SAIS's work, traditional agriculture, based on a subsistence farming system, turned into large-scale farming production,<sup>36</sup> which until then was totally unknown to Somali farmers. Although the land agreements were considered the best and the most convenient solution for the local population, who remained the owners of the land,<sup>37</sup> they entailed significant limitations for the Somalis. Thus, the contract has been defined as both promoting slavery and paternalistic,<sup>38</sup> and has been harshly criticized by historians such as Angelo Del Boca, who affirmed how Somalis were forced to stay and work in the territories ceded to the company, even after the initial works had ended.<sup>39</sup>

The Duke of Abruzzi's thinking was partially influenced by the agronomist Romolo Onor, who had outlined a new method for exploiting Somali land in a profitable manner. He strongly believed in what was called *compartecipazione* (joint participation). The state would act with private investors to establish agricultural consortiums, where Somalis would cultivate crops for commercial purposes and for local consumption. The government, in exchange, provided the local workers with agricultural, medical, and social services, and with an export market for the commercial crops

<sup>34</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, 40.

<sup>35</sup> The acquired lands were in the meander of Balguri and Balano. The SAIS bought the Balguri's territory to establish the village destined to the European and for building the headquarter of the consortium, while the Balano's area was destined to the plantations. Ibid., 42.

<sup>36</sup> Pablo Dell'Osa, *Il principe esploratore. Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duca degli Abruzzi* (Milano: Mursia, 2010), 343.

<sup>37</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Strangio, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2. 82.

they farmed, instead of paying them wages.<sup>40</sup> Onor argued that the failure of Somalian colonization was due to inadequate investment. He also thought that the government had to entrust the management of the agricultural companies to the indigenous population.<sup>41</sup> In 1920, the colonial government relied on the agrarian survey conducted by Onor at Genale to develop these agricultural lands. In this context, the Duke's society represented a novelty in Italian farming colonization of Somalia, as the company operated in a huge area where no other agrarian experiments had been carried out before.

### A "GOOD" MODEL OF COLONIALISM? THE SAIS AND FORCED LABOUR

The SAIS could accomplish its activities only on a long-term basis; thus, it needed to permanently settle local manpower within its claimed lands, which were divided into small parcels where specific villages were constructed for the workers.<sup>42</sup> However, the workforce essentially consisted of nomadic populations, who returned to their hometowns as soon as they had health problems, had earned sufficient money, or became homesick. Such events often occurred during the harvesting season, which affected the work schedules of the company.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, this lack of manpower affected the Duke's original plan, which was to settle up to 6000 Somali farmers within the SAIS's concessions: in reality less than 2500 decided to stay.<sup>44</sup> This situation shows how the Duke's society had a constant need for a workforce and how "the personal influence of the Duke over the population was more often than not sufficient to solve these difficulties".<sup>45</sup> Some biographers of Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta have not mentioned these aspects, and include Adriano Augusto Michieli, who represented the Prince as someone who with "his overpowering tenacity had built villages for 3,000 families of indigenous workers".<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Lee Cassanelli, "The End of Slavery and the 'Problem' of Farm Labor in Colonial Somalia" (paper presented at the Third International Congress of Somali Studies, Roma, 1988), 275.

<sup>41</sup> Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall'Unità alla marcia su Roma*, 1. 870.

<sup>42</sup> Labanca, 318.

<sup>43</sup> Strangio, 80.

<sup>44</sup> Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2. 83.

<sup>45</sup> Strangio, 80.

<sup>46</sup> Adriano Augusto Michieli, *Il Duca degli Abruzzi e le sue imprese* (Milano: Fratelli Treves Editori, 1937), 171.

Despite the company's efforts to improve working conditions by supplying a medical care system,<sup>47</sup> the number of local settlers did not increase.<sup>48</sup> Thus, in 1924, the society asked for colonial government support to obtain a source of fixed manpower for the dependency, and resorted to forced labour in accordance with the principle that it could be accepted in the case of works declared of "public utility".<sup>49</sup> The arrangement forced the villages surrounding the Jowar area to supply monthly manpower for the SAIS.<sup>50</sup> Despite the use of forced labour, the situation did not improve and in 1930, the Duke's company recruited its workforce from Southern Ethiopia through the support of the sultan Olol Dinle, who was a loyal ally of Italy, and noted that "he regularly supplies manpower to the SAIS".<sup>51</sup> This evidence shows that even the SAIS acted similarly to other agricultural concessions in Somalia. The use of forced labour was necessary to the Duke's company because of the severity of the effects of the manpower scarcity, which was a chronic problem for the fascist colonial administration.

The request for manpower by the SAIS affected Somali society by revolutionizing its social order in two main ways. Firstly, the Duke aimed to establish a huge agricultural consortium, but the scarcity of pre-existing local populations devoted to agricultural work meant the necessary workforce could not be supplied. Secondly, agriculture was considered by Somalis, at that time, less important than livestock and warfare activities.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> At the beginning of its activities, the SAIS built a clinic, both for Somali and Italian workers, to supply them with basic medical care. Later, when the village grew, the company decided to turn the clinic into a hospital for Somali (1921) and then for Italians in 1924. The society had two hospitals, the "Antonio Cecchi" and the "Luigi di Savoia", which respectively supplied medical care for indigenous personnel and for the Italians. The medical personnel conducted scientific research on the health conditions at *Villabruzzi*, studying malarial fever and other subtropical illnesses of Somalia. By 1929, the medical assistance increasingly focused on the company's village health conditions, where the main part of the company's manpower lived. Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, 141–143, 256.

<sup>48</sup> Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2, 83.

<sup>49</sup> On 28 June 1930, the Geneva Convention n. 29 concerning forced labour was adopted. Article 2 stated that a nation could use forced labour in particular situations, such as: building structures of military importance; conducting works related to special events as earthquakes, floods, famines, or epidemic diseases; or conducting works of public utility. However, this clause was adopted even before 1930, especially by those nations that had colonial possessions.

<sup>50</sup> Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2, 83–84.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>52</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, 55.

Thus, there were very few farmers who preferred cultivating their own small parcels for personal needs. These preferences reflected the habits of the country. From the beginning of the SAIS activities, Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta and the company's technicians did not ignore the situation as they took the precaution of temporarily hiring Arab and Eritrean manpower.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the joint-participation agreement seemed, even with the limitations already mentioned, the only possible form of contract that settled the workers on the land.

Furthermore, it was impossible for the SAIS to apply a single form of contract due to the varying ethnicities of the groups involved. For this reason, the society diversified its agreements, respecting the traditional customs of Somalis and retaining the role of their chiefs. Eventually, the SAIS settled its workers on the basis of their ethnicity, gathering them in separate villages to avoid inter-group conflicts.<sup>54</sup>

#### LUIGI AMEDEO OF SAVOIA-AOSTA AND THE SAIS AS LANDMARKS IN FASCIST COLONIAL POLICY

An extensive description of the terms of the joint-participation treaty can be found in *L'opera della Società Agricola Italo-Somala in Somalia: significato e valore delle realizzazioni, delle esperienze e degli studi compiuti dalla S.A.I.S. nei suoi 44 anni di vita* (1970) by Ferdinando Bigi, Ugo Funaioli, and Vasco Gatti. This document explains how the SAIS's activities impacted the whole of colonial Somalia, helping to make the Duke of Abruzzi and the company itself landmarks in fascist colonial policy. Specifically, the authors point out that the joint-participation system represented an absolute innovation for Somalia. The Somalis settled within the consortium each received one hectare (two daréb) of the land already claimed, deforested and ready to be irrigated. Each farmer had to cultivate half with corn for his own needs and the other with cotton, which was the property of the SAIS. The company collected the harvest, paying a fixed price based on the quality of the product.

However, the company supported the farmer in carrying out the hardest work, such as the tillage, using tractors or cows, and the workers paid the society a different rent depending on whether the work was conducted by tractors or cows. The SAIS built houses for the Somali workers, encour-

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 56.

aging them to settle the area according to their ethnicity. Once the village reached 60 or 80 shelters, the company also built a mosque, a grocery store and sometimes a drinkable water-well.<sup>55</sup> The declared purpose of these enhancements provided to the local tribes was to force them to inhabit the lands where they worked. Furthermore, for the first time, a private company negotiated with single workers and not with a chief as a representative of a tribe, as had always previously happened in Somalia. The conditions elaborated by the Duke's company convinced the colonial government to issue a new labour contract, the so-called *Contratto di Colonia* (Colonial Agreement), which was extended to the whole colony by 1935.<sup>56</sup> Fascism had always provided stronger endorsement of Genale, which was the state consortium, rather than *Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi*,<sup>57</sup> but the difficulties experienced at Genale made the relationship between Italian settlers and local workers quite complicated; thus it was decided to export the SAIS's labour contract to Genale in order to improve its work system.

The fascist colonial administration had tried to solve Genale's problem with workforce conditions even by the end of the 1920s. The difficulties were clearly reported by the regional commissioner of Merca,<sup>58</sup> Dal Re, to the new general governor Guido Corni. "The problem of manpower is persistent and omnipresent [and] the method of recruitment has only solved the situation temporarily".<sup>59</sup> He argued that the Colonial Government was unable to keep workers within the concession because the employers did not respect the contract they had with their employees. In an attempt to find a remedy for this problem, the administration issued the *Contratto Annuale di Lavoro* (Annual Labour Agreement) to improve the working conditions of the local farmers. Del Re blamed the Italian concessionaires as the cause of the problematic relationship between colonizers and local workers. Although the commissioner apparently attributed the responsibility for such problems to the Italian settlers, the

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 242.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 241–243.

<sup>57</sup> Labanca, 319.

<sup>58</sup> Italian Somaliland was divided into *Commissariati Regionali* (Regional Commissions) for administrative purposes. These included the Regional Commissions of Upper Scebeli, Lower Scebeli, and Mogadishu. Del Re was the Commissioner of the Lower Scebeli Region and its capital was located in Merca.

<sup>59</sup> Archivio Storico del Ministero Affari Esteri, Roma, "Archivio di Personalità – Guido Corni 1928–1931", Pacco 24, Realzione di Del Re a Guido Corni, pp. 3–5. Henceforth ASMAE.

work contracts issued for Genale's workers highlighted the fascist racist concepts of the time. "The indigenous worker must respect the tenant of the concession because he is a dependent worker and because 'the white' represents the race that rules over the country in order to lead it towards a better future".<sup>60</sup> In addition, the colonial administration's efforts to issue a contract to improve the Genale production system overlapped the pre-existing contract, the so-called *Contratto Agricolo Bertello* that protected the indigenous peasants. However, the Italian tenant farmers made arbitrary interpretations of it to take advantage of the local population.<sup>61</sup> The *Contratto Annuale di Lavoro* envisaged that the concession holders ceded a parcel of land in good condition to each worker, as well as accommodation that was suitable to the needs of the worker. The similarities between this model and that used in the SAIS agricultural concessions are noteworthy.

The fascist government was significantly involved in financing the SAIS's activities, as its various interventions demonstrate. In November 1922, the Ministry for the Colonies had granted the SAIS a loan of 20,000,000 Lire (approximately € 19,000,000) to support its activities. On 29 May 1923, the Duke himself applied for financial aid from the *Consiglio Superiore Coloniale* (High Colonial Council).<sup>62</sup> The *Consiglio Superiore Coloniale* justified the remarkable amount necessary "to carry out a colonizing programme on the massive scale [that the society] is currently conducting through good organization and leadership",<sup>63</sup> while the SAIS stated it would use the new loan for supplying the Italian national market with up to 10,000 quintals of cotton per annum by building seven new farms within its Somali land concession.<sup>64</sup> The involvement of the state in supporting the company led to the creation of a special fund for

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, Circolare di Del Re ai Concessionari di Genale, 26 agosto 1929, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2005), 157.

<sup>62</sup> The *Consiglio Superiore Coloniale* was a branch of the Ministry for the Colonies. It was divided into three departments, among which was the Department for Financial and Economic Affairs for the colonies. As per the bureaucratic procedure, all financial requests from the colonial companies had to be sent to the local *Governo Coloniale*, then to the Ministry for the Colonies, which eventually sent the application to the *Consiglio Superiore Coloniale*.

<sup>63</sup> ASMAE, Ministero Africa Italiana Vol. V, Archivio Consiglio Superiore Coloniale, busta 3, "Deliberazione del Consiglio Superiore Coloniale – Mutuo suppletivo a favore della S.A.I.S.", 12 settembre 1923.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

“colonial purposes”. The Ministry of Finance, in conjunction with the Ministry of the Colonies, budgeted 35,000,000 Lire (approximately € 33,600,000) to supply government assistance to those societies committed to overseas commercial, agricultural and reclamation activities.<sup>65</sup>

At the beginning of its activities, the Duke’s company mainly focused on cotton cultivation. However, it soon enlarged its farming production by cultivating castor beans, sunflower, sesame seeds and sugarcane. The new plantations brought about the development of an industrial complex at Baiahaio within a very short time, with a Decauville railway connected to the *Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi*. By December 1922 a cotton mill was officially opened and in 1925 an oil mill was established. Baiahaio represented the most modern industrial settlement in Somalia at that time.<sup>66</sup> The sugar production was part of a wider industrial plan that led to the foundation of the *Società Saccarifera Somala* (SSS), which was a branch of the Duke’s society.<sup>67</sup> The SSS was established on 12 April 1926 in Genova and was headquartered in the *Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi*. Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta was elected chairman of the SSS and he required new funds for the *Consiglio Superiore Coloniale* to build a sugar refinery run by the SSS.<sup>68</sup> In just three months (18 September 1926), the *Consiglio Superiore Coloniale* approved the SSS’s request, pointing out to the central government that the Duke of Abruzzi’s new society “could considerably contribute to the development of the industrial cultivation of Somalia”.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Although the SAIS was one of a number of private companies operating in Somalia in colonial activities, the government economic support that it received was quite different to that received by other societies. ASMAE, Roma, Ministero Africa Italiana Vol. I 1857-1939, busta 89/17, f. 66, “Imprese ed Aziende agrarie, industriali e commerciali in Somalia”, Relazione del Governatore Giovanni Cerrina Feroni al Ministero delle Colonie, 16 giugno 1920.

Among the societies operating in Somalia was the *Società Romana di Colonizzazione in Somalia* (est. 1909). It was based in Margherita (Italian Somaliland) and by 1922 in Mogadishu. The *Società Romana* was one of the first companies to attempt cotton cultivation in the Jubba region. It received 5000 ha of land from the government and in 1909, it was also financed with 360,000 Lire (approximately € 1,517,000). Later, the *Società Romana di Colonizzazione in Somalia* “became one the most important sister companies of the SAIS, especially in banana production”. Strangio. 93.

<sup>66</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, 103–104.

<sup>67</sup> Andrea Naletto, *Italiani in Somalia. Storia di un colonialismo straccione* (Verona: Cierre Edizioni, Centro Studi Ettore Lucchini, 2011), 83.

<sup>68</sup> ASMAE, Roma, Ministero Africa Italiana Vol. V, Archivio Consiglio Superiore Coloniale, Busta 3.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, busta 1.

Such opinions were based on the belief that SAIS's large-scale activities were the best possible solution to improving Italian Somaliland in terms of agricultural profit. This new perspective contrasted with the agricultural methods used at Genale, where sugarcane cultivation was not carried out on an industrial scale, despite the area being declared adequate for large-scale sugar production in 1917.<sup>70</sup> The sugar refinery was built in just two years and was officially opened on 2 March 1928, allowing the SSS to process 100,000 quintals of cane per annum. By February 1929, the SAIS had also built a distillery for synthesizing alcohol from the sugarcane production waste, which distilled up to 7500 litres of alcohol per day.<sup>71</sup>

The fascist colonial administration devoted considerable attention to the colonial SAIS's projects in terms of financing its activities and lauding its achievements. No other private company received so much economic support from the government as the SAIS. Fascist propaganda lauded the Duke of Abruzzi's colonial accomplishments and his farming colony. Villabruzzi was represented as a successful model for colonizing Somalia, which contrasted with the state experiments carried out in Genale, where the colonial government experienced many difficulties as described above. However, the comparison between Villabruzzi and Genale shows the differences between the Duke of Abruzzi and the first fascist governor of the colony, the quadrumvir Cesare Maria De Vecchi.<sup>72</sup> This was underlined by Andrea Naletto in his *Italiani in Somalia. Storia di un colonialismo straccione*, which defines Genale as the antithesis of Villabruzzi.<sup>73</sup> The significant difference between them was the concept of land ownership: according to the Duke's view, the local tribes remained the owners of the territories, allowing the SAIS to exploit them for 99 years, while De Vecchi argued that all the land belonged to the state.<sup>74</sup> The agreement between

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, busta 3.

<sup>71</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, 105–106.

<sup>72</sup> In 1923, Mussolini dismissed the liberal governor, Carlo Rivieri, and appointed Cesare Maria De Vecchi as the new governor of Italian Somaliland. He was an influential fascist as he had been one of the *Quadrumviro* of the March on Rome and was also the leader of the Turin fascists. De Vecchi focused on developing agriculture and reclaiming land in the Genale region, transforming the Genale plateau (40,000 hectares) into a huge farm. It was "the eventual success of the SAIS scheme that encouraged De Vecchi to create a vast irrigation project for plantation cultivation at Genale". Lewis, 95.

<sup>73</sup> Naletto, 87.

<sup>74</sup> Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2. 82.

Somalis and the Duke's company was considered highly innovative for that time,<sup>75</sup> although the SAIS eventually resorted to using forced labour to work the land.

However, the novelty introduced by the SAIS's pacts was disapproved by De Vecchi, who argued that the workers could only receive land as a concession from the state.<sup>76</sup> According to the historian Del Boca, this different perspective was the basis for the disagreement between the Duke and the governor.<sup>77</sup> Mussolini exploited the disagreement between them for political purposes. *Il Duce* sent De Vecchi to Somalia to control De Vecchi's boisterous character, as he was speaking against industrial power and creating some problems for Mussolini, who was focused on gaining national and international approval for fascism.<sup>78</sup> In this context, the regime publicly emphasized the Duke's 'colonizing efforts' in Somalia, without mentioning what the governor De Vecchi was doing in Genale. This was probably intentional, since Mussolini appointed De Vecchi as general governor to keep him away from Italy because of his behaviour. In addition, on November 1924 Pietro Lanza di Scalea, the Minister for the Colonies, acknowledged the Duke's work in his speech about the colonies' situation, as a landmark in colonial policy, while De Vecchi was not mentioned.<sup>79</sup>

De Vecchi was also harshly criticized by colonial supporters in Rome, who blamed him for creating conflict in Somalia because of his brutal methods and his ignorance of the real conditions of the colony.<sup>80</sup> The fascist 'glorification' of the Duke of Abruzzi reached its height after his death (19 March 1933); Mussolini officially commemorated the Prince in his speech at the Chamber of Deputies on 20 March 1933. He described the Duke as "a pioneer and the full embodiment of the new Italian", who decided to be buried in Somalia, where "his sacrifice and tireless everyday work made fertile [that land]".<sup>81</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Dall'Unità alla marcia su Roma*, 1. 871–872. and *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2. 82.

<sup>76</sup> *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2.82.

<sup>77</sup> The duality between Luigi Amedeo di Savoia-Aosta and De Vecchi also emerged in the regime's public emphasis of the Duke's "colonizing efforts" in Somalia, without mentioning what the governor general, De Vecchi, was doing in Genale.

<sup>78</sup> Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2. 51.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>80</sup> Antonella Randazzo, *L'Africa del Duce: I crimini fascisti in Africa* (Varese: Edizioni Arterigere, 2008), 153–154.

<sup>81</sup> Benito Mussolini, "La commemorazione del Duca degli Abruzzi (20 Marzo 1933)," in *Discorsi*, ed. Balbino Giuliano (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1936), 315–316.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has focused on the activities of the SAIS from its foundation to the late 1920s, with the aim of retracing how the Duke of Abruzzi's agricultural colonial company impacted Somalia and Somalis. Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta believed that the Somalis' poor living conditions were generated by a combination of geographical, historical, and political factors, which could be modified by improving the political and civil structure of the territories and creating job opportunities.<sup>82</sup> Specifically, the foundation of a large-scale industrial farm could continuously employ many Somali and provide Somalia with essential products. The Duke elaborated the joint-participation system to ensure the availability of lands where he aimed to establish his farming colony. This arrangement was completely new in the history of Italian colonialism because Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta based his project on establishing a "cordial relationship" between the SAIS and Somalis. This statement represented a good innovation, compared with the attitude of that time, especially that of Governor Cesare Maria De Vecchi, who deprived the indigenous of any rights, arguing that the land belonged to the state and the workers could only receive land as a concession from the government.<sup>83</sup>

Although the Duke did not follow the colonial trend of the time and created a dialogue with Somalis, the SAIS's contracts totally tied the tribes to the company and deprived them of autonomy in making decisions about their lands. The Duke of Abruzzi needed to achieve the land concession in harmony with the local tribes to reach his goal, because they would supply the necessary manpower for the new industrial farm.<sup>84</sup> However, the Duke of Abruzzi still resorted to using forced labour when his Society was faced with a scarcity of local manpower. All these aspects contribute to reshaping the "myth of a good model of colonialism" relating to Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta and his agricultural company.

Undoubtedly, the activities carried out by the SAIS transformed the traditional Somali agricultural system, based on subsistence farming, turning it into a huge consortium, where farm production was developed on an industrial scale. The semi-nomadic Somali peasants were forced to inhabit the lands "acquired" by the SAIS, as the contracts of *patto* and

<sup>82</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, vi–vii.

<sup>83</sup> Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'impero*, 2. 82.

<sup>84</sup> Strangio, 75–78.

*vincolo* demonstrate. The Duke believed these pacts were the most suitable for guaranteeing a constant flow of manpower, while they limited the freedom of movement of local populations.

In addition to the mere work of land enhancement, the SAIS had also a social and political meaning. The Duke strongly believed his experimental company was a tool of progress for the Somalis, who worked for the first time in an organized system.<sup>85</sup> To realize his vision he promoted, through the SAIS's work, various social activities that included building modern villages equipped with bazaars, medical clinics, and schools. However, these works reflected the typical colonial policy of the time, based on racist perceptions of the local population. The schools clearly reflected this status, as they were specifically separated: "one for the indigenous children and one for the whites".<sup>86</sup>

The political meaning of the SAIS's activities emerged with the rise of fascism, which represented a turning point in the story of the Society. From that point, the government became increasingly involved in terms of financing and supporting the society. Until 1925, the fundamental backers of the SAIS had been the major Italian banks along with some industrialists and a few other private investors. The banks played a prominent role in financing the farming company by sponsoring its two capital increases (in 1925 the SAIS's assets reached 35,000,000 Lire, approximately € 29,000,000). Once the regime reinforced the presence of the state in the colonies, private financing became progressively less consistent in supporting the private societies acting in the colonies. Fascism also reshaped the bureaucratic apparatus of the Ministry for the Colonies by establishing a branch called the *Consiglio Superiore Coloniale*, which approved or rejected all financial requests from societies involved in colonial affairs. The *Consiglio* consistently supported the SAIS by financing it with two industrial loans and later by sponsoring a branch of the company, the *Società Saccarifera Somala*, which was established to manage sugarcane production.

The importance attributed to the SAIS was reflected in the government's consistent provision of industrial loans to the company, even though the amounts affected the budget allocated by the government for "colonial activity". The SAIS was not the sole private society acting in the colonies. Other companies also required state financial support, as has

<sup>85</sup> Bigi, Funaioli, and Gatti, ix.

<sup>86</sup> Michieli, 162.

been mentioned in this study. Thus, the Ministry of the Economy increased the balance of its special fund to back as many societies as possible. Moreover, the government publicly praised the SAIS and the Duke himself for propaganda purposes. This was confirmed by analysing the documents of the *Consiglio Superiore Coloniale*, in which the institution considers the “SAIS model” as an example of successful colonization and uses the merits of the society to justify the granting of a consistent industrial loan. The SAIS’s agricultural system seemed, indeed, to be better adapted to the Somali context than that of Genale, so much so that the government aimed to replicate it in the Genale district.

Furthermore, the fascist administration used skilled personnel from the Duke of Abruzzi’s company, such as the brilliant agronomist Scassellati-Sforzolini, to plan the colonization of other regions of Somalia. The fascist governor, Guido Corni, appointed Scassellati-Sforzolini to undertake an experimental project to colonize Afgooye (Afgoi in the Italian spelling of that time), located in the Lower Shebelle region, with Italian settlers.<sup>87</sup>

Fascist propaganda presented Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta and his experimental farming village as icons of colonialism “to popularise the image of overseas territories and support the popularity of the colonial enterprise”.<sup>88</sup> The Duke’s colonial achievements embodied the fascist rhetoric dogma of the ancient Roman, in which the soldier, after conquering a new territory, turned himself into a farmer, who cultivated and civilized the land.<sup>89</sup> The regime portrayed the Duke and the SAIS as a successful model of colonization in Somalia, to convince those who were doubtful about the potential of the colony. This was reinforced in the Duke’s obituary in the fascist monthly periodical *L’Italia Coloniale*:

<sup>87</sup> ASMAE, Roma, “Archivio di Personalità – Guido Corni 1928–1931”, Pacco 24. On August 1928, the new governor of Somalia, Guido Corni, appointed the SAIS’s agronomist and director Giuseppe Scassellati-Sforzolini to undertake a survey on the possibility of colonizing the Afgoi area using Italian settlers. This project was called *Esperimento di colonizzazione Bianca* (Experimental white colonization). The agronomist drafted a detailed report, but he concluded that it was quite difficult to populate the region using Italian immigrants because of the Somali climate and the small income that colonists would have earned cultivating these lands. Despite these considerations, Scassellati-Sforzolini argued that it was worth conducting an experiment in agricultural settlement because if it was successful, the result would lead to a total colonization and reclamation of Somalia.

<sup>88</sup> Polezzi, 294.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 296.

The Prince's demise affected not only the nation but above all, those who work in the colonial field [...] He created a very important consortium [and with his work] he above all demonstrated the real possibilities of the distant colony [Somalia] to those who were inert and doubtful; he traced the way, and provided a great and irrefutable example. Thus, Somalia undertook a new path of progress which has ensured [the colony] a secure future.<sup>90</sup>

Fascism interpreted the Somali "colonial heritage" of the Duke of Abruzzi as a model to be imitated in the whole Italian colonial system. This concept clearly appeared in the Duke's obituaries from two of the most significant fascist colonial state institutes: the Italian Colonial Agricultural Institute of Florence and the Fascist Colonial Institute:

The Italian Colonial Agricultural Institute [...] commends H.R.H. the Duke of Abruzzi to Italians, as the vanguard of the current phase of peaceful and economic conquest of the colonies. The impressive progress toward peace and wealth in the Jowar region also pointed out new goals for Italians. Fascism created the favourable conditions needed to practically develop those ideas [...] Italy is making progress in the colonies. The political and military phase is over. The colonies must become a tool of economic wealth and now offer jobs for Italians [...] In all the colonies where they work, Italian colonialists will assume the heritage of duties and training elaborated by the Duke. [His grave] will become the spiritual destination for all those Italians who [...] work towards making their Country great in Africa.<sup>91</sup>

[The Duke] founded the first great colonizing enterprise in Somalia, which was a forerunner and an encouragement for the other companies that blossomed later [...] It is our duty to remember the [greatness] of the SAIS [...] in solving the upcoming issues of African colonization so closely linked to our future. The *Società Agricola Italo-Somala*, through the work of Luigi of Savoia, has demonstrated in a practical way how a colonial firm [...] can be unfailingly victorious when it relies on precise studies of the environment [where it works]. Thanks to Luigi of Savoia and his *Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi*, the management of lands in the colony has seen a practical application and this experience has formed the basis of the resolution of the difficulties faced in Genale by the concessionaries.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> "In morte di Luigi di Savoia," *L'Italia Coloniale*, Aprile 1933, p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> Armando Maugini, "Commemorazione di S.A.R. Luigi di Savoia – 30 Marzo 1933," ed. Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano (Firenze: Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano, 1933), 18–19.

<sup>92</sup> Domenico Seghetti, "Luigi di Savoia colonizzatore ed esploratore in Somalia," ed. Istituto Coloniale Fascista (Savona: Brizio, 1933).

Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta was defined by Mussolini as a pioneer and the embodiment of the “new Italian”, which fascism aimed to create.

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# The Magical Hour of Midnight: The Annual Commemorations of Rhodesia's and Transkei's Independence Days

*Josiah Brownell*

Since our ancestors first emerged from the bogs of prehistory, there has been the mystical belief that beginnings augur fates, a notion that resonates through the numerological and astrological fascinations with the implications of the timing and particulars of the moment of birth. The moment when a new state is born and obtains a separate international personality is likewise granted a magical significance by national memory makers, and the commemorations of these Independence Days afterward are always invested with a great deal of symbolic power.<sup>1</sup> Like birthdays, dates of independence are seen as a fundamental part of a state's biological

<sup>1</sup>For a masterful exploration of this idea in fiction, see: Salman Rushdie. *Midnight's Children*. New York: Random House, 1981.

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reality.<sup>2</sup> Even if the exact placement of these dates were the results of prosaic and practical concerns, earlier equivocations about where they would fall in the calendar are subsequently written out of national histories, and the formal draping of national destiny covers all that might be unsightly. This chapter examines the timing and the particulars of the Rhodesian and Transkeian regimes' Independence Days, and dilates upon what these say about the natures of these illegal regimes.

The aesthetic aspects of Rhodesia's and Transkei's independence bids have not been taken too seriously in the academic literature, but they should be. National memory making is an inherently political exercise of distilling out, and inventing, certain salient moments from the past to recreate and celebrate, while collectively forgetting other moments.<sup>3</sup> David Kertzer writes that political rituals, including commemorations, should not be seen as "mere embellishments," but as vital parts of modern politics, since it is only "through participation in the rites, [that citizens] of the modern state identify with larger political forces that can only be seen in symbolic form."<sup>4</sup> Rhodesia would commemorate its independence 13 times, from 1966 to 1978, and Transkei would have 17 commemorations, from 1977 to 1993. Just as elements of their original independence moments were refashioned as they first became commemorated, so too did their commemorations themselves change over time. Commemorations of Independence Days in unrecognized states are necessarily provisional and aspirational, less about a public remembrance of the moment of independence than a constitutive performance of sovereignty and an expression of hope for what this day might one day mean. Unlike the growing literature on the role of national day commemorations in the creation and reinforcement of national identity in legal states, little has been written on the role of national days in unrecognized states

<sup>2</sup>The dates of independence, and the commemorations of those dates as national days, have become an almost essential pillar of nationhood. But not for all, it should be noted. Britain for example does not have an independence moment nor does it really have any true national days. See M. E. Geisler. "The Calendar Conundrum: National Days as Unstable Signifiers" and M. Skey. "We Wanna Show 'Em Who We Are' National Events in England," both in D. McCrone and G. MacPherson, eds. *National Days: Constructing and Mobilising National Identity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

<sup>3</sup>See the classic work on this idea: E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, eds. *Invented Traditions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

<sup>4</sup>D. Kertzer. *Ritual, Politics, and Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988. 1, 3.

in performing sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> It will be argued below that the aesthetics of their Independence Days and their subsequent commemorations were not primarily the result of spontaneity or serendipity, and neither did they derive from ancient or traditional sources, but were new, purposeful, and self-consciously political choices.

While different in many respects, Rhodesia and Transkei shared certain common elements that were of fundamental importance. In their struggles for recognition, both regimes mobilized certain transatlantic racial and anticommunist networks, and brought into focus specific kinds of ideological, political and symbolic contests having to do with the role of race and power in postcolonial Africa. Most significantly for this chapter, both regimes' claims for recognition of their sovereign status were rejected by the world community, and both were treated as pariahs internationally. These regimes' aesthetic choices about how their Independence Days looked and sounded were used as opportunities to communicate to various audiences the nature of these aspirant states, what kinds of states they wanted to be associated with and which they wanted to be dissociated from, and how these regimes thought their states would fit into the world community.

## RHODESIA

Rhodesia's small white settler population had been increasingly anxious about their future status within the rapidly decolonizing British Empire of the early 1960s. Prime Minister Ian Smith's ruling Rhodesian Front (RF) party openly threatened a break from Britain to preclude the possibility of African majority rule being imposed upon them from London.<sup>6</sup> Rhodesia's declaration of sovereign status did not, and indeed could not, have the

<sup>5</sup> There is a rich literature on history and politics of commemorations and national memory making. See, for example: R. Charumbira. *Imagining a Nation: History and Memory in Making Zimbabwe*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015.; L. Witz. *Apartheid's Festival: Contesting South Africa's National Pasts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. See also: D. McCrone and G. MacPherson, eds. *National Days: Constructing and Mobilising National Identity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.; J. Gillis, ed. *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the significance of racial population demographics on the Rhodesian rebellion, see: J. Brownell. *The Collapse of Rhodesia: Population Demographics and the Politics of Race*. London: IB Tauris, 2010.

public displays of Transkei's first Independence Day. Even as understood by its strongest advocates, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) was still an illegal act initially even if its supporters thought the resulting new state was legal. A month before he declared UDI, Ian Smith admitted that even though he thought such a break was morally justified, any unilateral declaration would be illegal "from a strictly constitutional point of view."<sup>7</sup> As such, even though nearly everyone expected a declaration at some point, it could not be advertised nor planned openly up to the very moment of the declaration.

When exactly UDI was going to be declared became a bit of a bettor's game. A rumor flew around British government circles in July 1965 that Ian Smith and his RF government were going to declare UDI on Rhodes Day on July 13, piggybacking on the obvious symbolism of that day.<sup>8</sup> That day came and went. The Rhodesian High Commissioner in London, Andrew Skeen, argued that should Rhodesia breakaway before the British General Election, this would ensure that Prime Minister Harold Wilson still only had a small majority in Parliament, and could not afford to ignore pro-Rhodesia public opinion in Britain.<sup>9</sup> Luise White noted that the Rhodesians were also weighing other considerations, having to do with the timing of the March tobacco harvest, in light of Britain's likely response of boycotting Rhodesia's biggest export, and the November expiration of the preventative detention law.<sup>10</sup> J.R.T. Wood describes how the timing of UDI was possibly also influenced by the belief in Rhodesian circles that Britain was so preoccupied with the Kashmir crisis between India and Pakistan, that word of a UDI might actually relieve Britain of another unpleasant problem.<sup>11</sup> So the idea that a UDI was imminent was on everyone's lips, and there were arguments for when exactly it would come, but no one except a very small circle around Ian Smith knew exactly when.

Rhodesia's UDI was made on November 11, 1965, with the RF Cabinet members portentously gathering around a table in Government

<sup>7</sup> Ian Smith to Alexander Skeen (telegram), October 16, 1965. Quoted in J.R.T. Wood, *So Far and No Further: Rhodesia's Bid for Independence During the Retreat from Empire*. Victoria, CA: Trafford Publishing, 2005. 395.

<sup>8</sup> Wood. *So Far and No Further*, 330.

<sup>9</sup> A. Skeen. *Prelude to Independence: Skeen's 115 Days*. Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1966. 59–61.

<sup>10</sup> Luise White. *Unpopular Sovereignty: Rhodesian Independence and African Decolonization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 106–107.

<sup>11</sup> Wood. *So Far and No Further*. 363.

House to sign the scrolled document. The document itself was written in a frilly calligraphy with elaborate initials and decorations around the margins, as though it was an illuminated manuscript a participant would win at a local Renaissance Faire. The rebels signed the Declaration under a portrait of the Queen, implying that she was silently presiding over the transfer of power. As Ian Smith signed the UDI document, a famous photo was taken of the event, and later in the day he gave a speech over the Rhodesian radio explaining the break with Britain. This entire tableau communicated an orderly and legal process belying that this was an illegal act of rebellion.

Which parts of their British heritage the regime clung to and which parts they discarded were vague and unstable. There was a great deal of loyalty to the Queen among whites in the early years after UDI, which ran alongside a deep hostility toward British politicians.<sup>12</sup> Rhodesia's UDI was in this way unlike the American colonies' break with Britain, which was accompanied by spontaneous mock funeral processions for King George. And even though the UDI document was written in language lifted rather shamelessly from Jefferson's Declaration of Independence,<sup>13</sup> unlike the American Revolution the end goal of the Rhodesian regime's break from Britain was simply entry into the British Commonwealth as sovereign equals under the Queen.<sup>14</sup>

While there were a variety of reasons for the general timing of UDI, that it was on November 11, the same day as Remembrance Day, was not a coincidence. Rhodesians always portrayed UDI as a patriotic rebellion; something not intended to be oxymoronic. For Rhodesians, Remembrance Day served as a stark reminder that Rhodesia had fought with Britain in two bloody world wars, but they were now denied their independence and shunned out of what the settlers considered to be political expediency.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>For an interesting look at the loyalty issue around the time of UDI, see: C. Watts. "Killing Kith and Kin: The Viability of British Military Intervention in Rhodesia, 1964-5." *Twentieth Century British History* 16, no. 4. January 2005.

<sup>13</sup>D. Armitage. *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. 135. This was done on purpose, as Ian Smith himself acknowledged. I. Smith. *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal*. London: Blake, 2001. 103.

<sup>14</sup>This would soon change, as the Rhodesian electorate approved a new republican constitution in 1969 which purportedly went into effect in 1970.

<sup>15</sup>J.R.T. Wood, for one, claims that November 11 was chosen because of its symbolic attachment to the sacrifices made by Rhodesians during the two world wars. J.R.T. Wood. *A Matter of Weeks Rather than Months: the Impasse Between Harold Wilson and Ian Smith: Sanctions, Aborted Settlements and War 1965-1969*. Victoria, CA: Trafford, 2008. 463.

The cooption of war remembrance was therefore a way to merge the concepts of rebellion and loyalty, reconciled by Rhodesian's insistence that they were loyal to an older, better Britain, the Imperial Britain of World War II and Winston Churchill.<sup>16</sup> Stacking UDI on top of Remembrance Day offered Rhodesians an annual propaganda truncheon.

One symbolically rich site of contest during the rebellion was in the placing of wreaths on the Cenotaph in London and the planting of crosses in London's Field of Remembrance in St. Margaret's, Westminster.<sup>17</sup> Immediately after he learned UDI had been declared in Salisbury, the head of the Rhodesia House mission in London, Andrew Skeen, took part in the Remembrance Day ceremony that was also attended by the Queen Mother.<sup>18</sup> At the ceremony everyone else was unaware of the rebellion, but by the time it had concluded, and before Skeen arrived back at Rhodesia House, word had finally arrived in London and crowds had gathered out in front of Rhodesia House.<sup>19</sup>

Every year thereafter, Rhodesia's efforts to commemorate its war dead in London made for some awkward moments for the British government. On the one year anniversary of UDI, one MP asked the government in the House of Commons why the pipe band of the Scots Guard had been forbidden to play in remembrance of the fallen Rhodesians on Remembrance Day, and if there would be any Rhodesia wreath at all to honor the Rhodesian dead on the Cenotaph, to which the Commonwealth Secretary explained that he personally would lay the Rhodesia wreath down.<sup>20</sup> The new head of the Rhodesia House mission in London, Sydney Brice, was not invited to the official ceremony but nonetheless placed another wreath himself at the Cenotaph memorial bearing the inscription, "from the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Government, and people of Rhodesia..."<sup>21</sup> In the House of Lords, Lord Salisbury, the President of the pro-Rhodesian Anglo-Rhodesian Society, spoke to defend the laying of a separate Rhodesia wreath, disingenuously pleading that this was "an act of simple piety by the

<sup>16</sup> See: J. Brownell. "Out of Time: Global Settlerism, Nostalgia, and the Selling of the Rhodesian Rebellion Overseas." *The Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, no. 4. 2017.

<sup>17</sup> See for example: "War Dead are Not Forgotten," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 8, 1969.

<sup>18</sup> A. Skeen. *Prelude*, 148.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Mr. Biggs-Davison, Mr. Bowden, "Remembrance Day Ceremony (Rhodesia)," *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, November 8, 1966.

<sup>21</sup> See: British PRO, DO 207/112, Letter from Neale to RAR Baltrop, November 15, 1966; Letter from Watson to Neale, November 16, 1966.

Rhodesians towards their own war dead..."<sup>22</sup> Against these pieties, the government's legalistic responses were left wanting. Brice would again lay a wreath at the Cenotaph a year later, this one bearing an inscription: "To the memory of the South African and Rhodesian dead, forgotten by so many."<sup>23</sup>

### THE BELL OF THE BALL

Commemorating UDI in Rhodesia was always a white affair. But even among whites it was a narrow group invited to official celebrations. Public Independence Day celebrations in the streets were rare over the 15-year rebellion. Only the five-year anniversary in 1970 featured a broader public celebration with a parade, but this was an anomaly that never happened before or after. In an unintentionally defensive editorial from 1969, the *Rhodesia Herald* describes how the Independence Day celebrations on the day had, by its fifth year, established certain patterns of observance that evokes an image of a loveless marriage:

Spontaneous celebration of any event is difficult to maintain year in year out. The anniversaries of UDI are marked by Independence Balls, statements by the Prime Minister and official receptions but not by street parades, flag waving or other such-like celebrations. Only ostentatious people carry their enthusiasm that far. Being largely of phlegmatic British stock, most Rhodesian Europeans were content to observe yesterday's Independence Day as just another holiday – very welcome as such but not calling especially for any obeisance or rejoicing. UDI is now firmly into its place in the Rhodesia calendar, to make of it what you will. The dedicated unilateralists seek out the formal celebrations, the others loaf or recreate – and presumably everybody is happy.<sup>24</sup>

On the first anniversary of UDI in 1966, there was, in a sense, a blank slate for the regime to perform this commemoration however it wanted. Rhodesia's UDI would come to be publicly celebrated primarily through the Independence Balls held on the night of November 10th. This started as a private charity ball the night before the public holiday hosted by the

<sup>22</sup> Marquess of Salisbury, "Cenotaph Service for Rhodesian Dead," *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, November 9, 1966.

<sup>23</sup> "Greetings to Rhodesia at Cenotaph," *The Times*, November 13, 1967.

<sup>24</sup> "Holiday Moods," *Rhodesia Herald* editorial, November 12, 1969.

Lions Club of Salisbury in Harry Margolis Hall.<sup>25</sup> These were very much elite, white affairs, and narrower still, affairs for RF party members, state functionaries, and their overseas visitors, and the only Africans present were the wait staff. It was only ever rendered public only through the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation's (RBC) live broadcast over the radio which offered a glimpse inside but not actual access.

Within the Hall that first night there was dinner and dancing building up to the climax at midnight. As midnight approached, Smith told the cheering crowd: "This is the beginning of a wonderful era." He then unveiled a 250-pound copper-bronze Bell that was modeled on the American Liberty Bell, with a native Mukwa wood frame.<sup>26</sup> The Independence Bell was inscribed: "I toll for justice, civilization, and Christianity,"<sup>27</sup> mirroring Smith's speech the year before in his announcement of UDI.<sup>28</sup> After the unveiling, Smith then rang the Bell 12 times at midnight. He told the all-white partygoers: "Every time it rings it means a nail in the coffin of the people who want to interfere in the internal affairs of Rhodesia. Those days are gone forever."<sup>29</sup>

The symbolically freighted Bell became a cherished invented tradition. As an article in 1971 explained, the Bell was in the Prime Minister's office for "363 or 364" days of the year, and only taken down to the site of the Independence Ball to be rung at the dance.<sup>30</sup> A column in the *Rhodesia Herald* from 1971 guessed that only 3000 or 4000 Rhodesians, all those who had ever been to one of the Salisbury Balls, have ever seen the Bell, as very few have been inside Smith's office.<sup>31</sup> Many would hear it ring on the radio broadcast or see it in photos in the press, but that was it: a tangible reflection of how small the circle of elites was that took part in official commemorations.

<sup>25</sup> The Margolis Hall event in 1972 was the first to be referred to as the "National Independence Ball." "UDI Celebrations This Weekend," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 7, 1972.

<sup>26</sup> "Smith Unveils 'Independence Bell' Gift," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 11, 1966; "PM is a Dab Hand at Tolling that Bell," *Rhodesia Herald*, Cabbages and Kings section, November 10, 1971.

<sup>27</sup> "Rhodesian Calls Stand Unshaken," *New York Times*, November 12, 1966.

<sup>28</sup> Ian Smith's radio address announcing UDI, November 11, 1965.

<sup>29</sup> "'Wonderful Era' Predicted," *New York Times*, November 11, 1966.

<sup>30</sup> "PM is a Dab Hand at Tolling that Bell," *Rhodesia Herald*, Cabbages and Kings section, November 10, 1971.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Projecting into the future a new tradition, replacing the only recently invented Bell ringing tradition in the Ball, a *Herald* columnist wrote: "Some day [the Bell] has to be proudly positioned in some public place. No decision has been reached as to where, and perhaps it's a bit premature to go into deep argument on the matter. But being ever the optimist, I have decided that there is no better place than in some suitably imposing and floodlit tower or monument in Cecil Square, a spot already historically hallowed."<sup>32</sup> Continuing on:

And each year at midnight on November 10 the populace will gather round to see and hear that 250lb copper bronze bell rung 12 times. 'But why 12 times,' young lads will ask, and old men will reply: 'Because it always was 12 times right from 1966.' The kids will look up at it and wonder about the bad old days, and the old men will go on to tell how Dorothy Goode saw a picture of the American Liberty Bell in an encyclopedia after UDI and thought Rhodesia should have one of its own. And how a new spare bell was found in Pretoria...And how the Works Department carpenter made a mukwa frame for it to stand on pro tem, and how if you get close to it, you can read "I toll for Justice, Civilization, and Christianity" – *Independence*, 11th November, 1965.<sup>33</sup>

This fascinating column imagined a future when Rhodesia's national traditions would have acquired the legitimizing patina of age, and it expressed without intending to a profound insecurity over how recently Rhodesia's national traditions had been invented, and how narrow the slice of the population was that actually participated in these annual commemorations.

Striking the Bell at midnight was a retroactive placement of Rhodesia's UDI within the legal "managed" decolonizations to the north of them, the so-called freedoms at midnight, a legitimization attempted through a historical invention of the significance of midnight for the Rhodesians.<sup>34</sup> Quite obviously, Rhodesia did not receive its sovereignty at midnight,

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> "PM is a Dab Hand at Tolling that Bell," *Rhodesia Herald*, Cabbages and Kings section, November 10, 1971. *The New York Times* reported that the Bell was "a former British warship's bell now the symbol of Rhodesia's rebellion against British rule." "Rhodesians celebrate 10 years of autonomy," *New York Times*, November 12, 1975.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the symbolism of midnight in these celebrations, see: R. Holland, S. Williams, and T. Barringer, eds. *The Iconography of Independence: 'Freedoms at Midnight.'* London: Routledge, 2010.

even accepting their sovereign claims they purportedly took it themselves when the Cabinet signed the UDI document at 11 am local Central Africa Time, and Ian Smith later announced it on a 20 minute radio broadcast on the RBC at 1:15 pm.<sup>35</sup> Nothing in the declaration referenced the legal effect of midnight at all, but this was no barrier to the regime investing the time of midnight as though Rhodesians did in fact receive legal independence like India and all other British ex-colonies that followed.

The Bell also linked Rhodesia to another aesthetico-ideological genre. In many ways Rhodesia's independence celebrations were pitched to appeal to American audiences, both those inside the hall and those who would hear about it second-hand. Smith and his overseas supporters were blatant in their attempts to marry 1776 and 1965 in American minds.<sup>36</sup> Conservative American groups were drawn to the idea of Rhodesia recreating American history and many toured Rhodesia to see it happen live. For American conservative groups, tours to Rhodesia were inextricably wrapped up in the politics of UDI, and having their tours overlap with the November 11th UDI celebrations, which they often did, was not simply a happy coincidence.<sup>37</sup> For some American conservatives, Rhodesia's UDI was seen to be also *their* day, and celebrating that day in the United States, and especially in Rhodesia, was an act of ideological communion.<sup>38</sup> The Bell thereby attached Rhodesia to two different and partially contradictory aesthetico-ideological linkages that cut two very different paths to legal statehood: the American revolutionary break and its reliance on natural law and the peaceful, mutually negotiated transfers of the managed decolonizations.

After the countdown to midnight and the Bell striking, Smith and his wife and all assembled guests would then hold hands as in the Hogmanay circle while everyone sang "Auld Lang Syne."<sup>39</sup> This was another nod to

<sup>35</sup> "Ten Years of UDI," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 11, 1975.

<sup>36</sup> This equation of 1776 and 1965 did not go uncontested. Prime Minister Wilson in particular challenged the linkage. See: James J. Kilpatrick' Op-Ed, "Disservice to Jefferson's Postulate," *Evening Star*, November 16, 1965; Arthur Krock editorial, "In the Nation: Rhodesia and 1776," *New York Times*, November 16, 1965.

<sup>37</sup> For example, a 1970 advertisement for a "Special Independence Day Tour" organized by the far right Liberty Lobby describes how their tour will arrive in Rhodesia "just in time for their biggest day – INDEPENDENCE DAY. You ride the crest of Rhodesian joy 'til the wee hours." Columbia University, Group Research Inc. Archives, Box 146, FRI file, Friends of Rhodesia newsletter 3, no. 2, (Fall 1970).

<sup>38</sup> See: J. Brownell. "Out of Time: Global Settlerism, Nostalgia, and the Selling of the Rhodesian Rebellion Overseas." *The Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, no. 4. 2017.

<sup>39</sup> "Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgotten?" *Rhodesia Herald*, November 12, 1969.

the “freedoms at midnight” ceremonies.<sup>40</sup> But certain partygoers might have also had a disorienting déjà vu as between UDI commemorations in November and Hogmanay in December since Margolis Hall was also the venue for the black tie Hogmanay Ball, where there was also a buffet dinner and dancing and, of course, as was Hogmanay tradition, “Auld Lange Syne” would be sung with hands held after midnight.<sup>41</sup> This first ceremony, as improvised and clubby as it was that first time, proved to be the template for all future ceremonies, and efforts to replicate earlier Balls became a part of Rhodesia’s nation-making project through the 1970s.

On the third anniversary of UDI in 1968, the regime introduced a new flag.<sup>42</sup> The old colonial flag with the canton of the Union Jack was replaced with an entirely new flag displaying their new national colors of green and white. A formal Retreat ceremony was then held with the lowering of the Union Jack flag from Cecil Square and the raising of the new flag, directly mimicking the ceremony from the managed decolonizations to their north, but with an oddly staggered timing.<sup>43</sup> This belated flag-swapping was characteristic of Rhodesia’s serialized independence. The British minister then in charge of negotiations to bring an end to the rebellion, George Thompson, was actually in Rhodesia at the time trying to salvage some accord after the failed HMS Fearless negotiations. In order to avoid any embarrassment of a high ranking British official being present during the UDI anniversary celebrations, Thompson arranged for a few days visit to Central and East Africa, purposely missing the flag-swapping ceremony.<sup>44</sup> How symbolically different was this than the freedoms at midnight celebrations with this representative of the mother country conspicuously retreating before the Beating the Retreat ceremony even began.

<sup>40</sup> See for example: Wm. Rogers Louis. *The Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez, and Decolonization*. London: IB Tauris, 2007. 443.

<sup>41</sup> See for example the 1972 advertisement for the Hogmanay Ball at Margolis Hall. “8 pm–2 am. Dancing to the Tommy Campbell Band...Book Early.” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 13, 1972.

<sup>42</sup> For an in-depth look into the politics and symbolism behind Rhodesia’s post-UDI flag, see: D. Kenrick. “These Colours Don’t Run: Changing the Rhodesian Flag, 1968.” Presentation to South African Historical Society’s Biennial Conference, Stellenbosch. July 2, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> “Flag of Independence is Raised,” *Rhodesia Commentary*, 2, no. 24, November 25, 1968.

<sup>44</sup> “Rift on Rhodesia Still Very Deep,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1968.

Rhodesia's UDI was an event celebrated abroad as well. In Pretoria, the Rhodesian Diplomatic Representatives hosted Independence Day parties at their official residence at Malvern House.<sup>45</sup> Kenneth Towsey, Rhodesia's pseudo-ambassador to the United States, hosted several UDI parties at his residence in Washington.<sup>46</sup> Rhodesia House in London likewise held UDI parties before the mission was shut down in 1969.<sup>47</sup> In Zambia, meanwhile, white residents were informed that they would be subject to arrest if they attempted to celebrate UDI, and this enforcement included checking on expatriate parties and clubs to ensure no celebrations occurred.<sup>48</sup> Zambia would eventually close all private clubs in the Copperbelt province, and bars would close early that day to preclude any sympathetic celebrations of UDI.<sup>49</sup> According to the *Herald*, Zambian authorities announced that some Zambian workers at these expatriate clubs reported that members shouted: "Long live UDI! Long Live Ian Smith!"<sup>50</sup>

The 1970 Independence Day celebrations marking the fifth year since UDI, and the first since their declaration of republic status, were something altogether different from earlier celebrations.<sup>51</sup> At the main Independence Ball event at Margolis Hall that year, the theme was "New Nation – 1890–1970." Five hundred attended the event, and the walls were decorated with blown up images of Rhodesia's new dollar notes and postage stamps.<sup>52</sup> These were the new trappings of statehood proudly displayed. A giant map of the Rhodesian republic "dominated the scene," and there were paintings of Cecil Rhodes, Clifford Dupont, and Ian Smith hanging in the Hall as though this was the Soviet Trinity.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See for example: "Quiet Tone in Celebrations," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 12, 1969.

<sup>46</sup> J. Brownell. "Diplomatic Lepers: The Katangan and Rhodesian Foreign Missions in the United States and the Politics of Nonrecognition." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 47, no. 2. 2014.

<sup>47</sup> J. Brownell. "'A Sordid Tussle on the Strand:' Rhodesia House During the UDI Rebellion." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 38, no. 3. September 2010.

<sup>48</sup> "Zambia Bans Celebration of UDI," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 10, 1969.

<sup>49</sup> "Zambia Acts to Stop UDI Revelry," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 11, 1969.

<sup>50</sup> "Zambia 'UDI Parties,'" *Rhodesia Herald*, November 13, 1973.

<sup>51</sup> The 1970 commemoration did not emphasize the republican break with the monarchy in any visible way, which was consistent with the regime's overall lack of enthusiasm regarding their declaration of republic status.

<sup>52</sup> For the significance of the new currency and postage stamps, see: J. Brownell. "The Visual Rhetoric of Stamps: Katanga, Rhodesia, and the Projection of Sovereignty." Paper presented to "Settler Colonial Literatures in Comparison" panel at the American Comparative Literature Association. Seattle, WA, March 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Picture caption of Ian and Janet Smith, *Rhodesia Herald*, November 11, 1970.

The 1970 Independence Day parade would be the biggest ever held in Rhodesia.<sup>54</sup> Gone was the smug humility touted by the *Herald* editorial board the year before, and here were the “street parades” and “flag waving” enthusiasm formerly expressed only by “ostentatious people.”<sup>55</sup> In preparation for the parade, the streets of central Salisbury were closed from 6 am on the morning of the parade. All traffic would be stopped as the mile-long progression worked its way up Jameson Avenue.<sup>56</sup> The overflights before the parade included a squadron of helicopters, followed by fighter jets and bombers.<sup>57</sup> On the saluting dais was the new Rhodesia Head of State, Clifford Dupont, the man who that year purportedly replaced the Queen as Head of State, who was seated alongside Ian Smith and other Cabinet officials and heads of the police and branches of the armed services.<sup>58</sup> Significantly, no foreign dignitaries were present for the festivities; even South Africa and Portugal were notable in their absence. In this respect, the 1970 ceremony in Rhodesia was similar to Transkei’s independence ceremonies—tightly orchestrated, martial, and with an embarrassing absence of foreign delegations.

Ultimately it was estimated that more than 22,000 lined Jameson Avenue in Salisbury to watch the military parade in 1970, the majority of whom were white. But the *Herald* noted that many Africans watched as well, including “21 chiefs, resplendent in their white topees, their mauve and scarlet robes and brass badges of office.”<sup>59</sup> Several hundred other Africans also watched the parade, mainly from the Jameson Avenue parking structure. Interestingly, those Africans who witnessed it from the structure were asked about the parade, and they indicated that their attendance did not imply that they supported UDI, but only that they wanted to see the spectacle.<sup>60</sup> As reported by the *Herald*, Africans may have craned their necks and strained to catch the sights but they did not clap, as one African interviewed said: “This is not our affair.”<sup>61</sup> Continuing on, the

<sup>54</sup> “Seven Flights of Planes for Big ‘UDI Parade’ ” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 10, 1970.

<sup>55</sup> Editorial, “Holiday Moods,” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 12, 1969.

<sup>56</sup> “Closing of Streets on November 11,” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 7, 1970.

<sup>57</sup> Leading the parade were 17 British South African Police (BSAP) motorcyclists in a V formation, then 16 mounted horsemen, the BSAP band, 31 units of troops, and a mechanized column including over 200 vehicles. “Seven Flights of Planes for Big ‘UDI Parade,’ ” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 10, 1970.

<sup>58</sup> “Sunday Rehearsal for the Big Parade,” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 2, 1970.

<sup>59</sup> “Parade Seen by 22,000,” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 12, 1970.

<sup>60</sup> “Africans Came to See Pageantry,” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 13, 1970.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

unnamed African said: "If this day was to commemorate African independence, all the Africans from the townships would have assembled here. Most of the Africans are here simply to see what is going on."

The 1971 celebration had no parade, but the official Independence Balls had expanded to different parts of the country with various Cabinet ministers attending each one.<sup>62</sup> That Rhodesian independence took on this certain form is notable. These had become less state driven so much as RF party driven, and Cabinet ministers took on the roles of substitute heads of state. In 1976 the *New York Times* quoted an anonymous white Rhodesian who said of the guests of the Balls: "Half of the men [at the Ball] are civil servants. They are the ones who have run the party, and the party has run the country."<sup>63</sup> This function was in some ways a reflection of Rhodesia being essentially a one-party state under the RF.

The 1973 celebrations occurred under the shadow of a dramatic escalation of the guerrilla war. The theme of the 1973 Ball was "early Rhodesian settlers," and the program featured Rhodesian pioneers on the cover.<sup>64</sup> In keeping with this theme, inside Harry Margolis Hall was a reconstructed settler-era camp with a replica wagon.<sup>65</sup> Despite the transient character of white Rhodesia, with most having only recently arrived into the territory, this display was part of a wider project connecting Rhodesia's rebellion more explicitly to an older southern African settler tradition, and the African food alongside the wagon reinforced this attempted indigenization of the white settler in Africa.<sup>66</sup> As always Smith rang the Bell 12 times, but the *Herald* political reporter mistakenly thought he was supposed to ring it only eight times, one for each year of independence as opposed to 12 for midnight, the reporter accusing Smith of dropping a "clanger."<sup>67</sup> This was a common mistake.

<sup>62</sup> "Seven Independence Balls," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 9, 1971.

<sup>63</sup> "Rhodesians Celebrate 11th Anniversary of Breakaway," *New York Times*, November 12, 1976.

<sup>64</sup> "Sadza to be Independence Ball Treat," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 7, 1973.

<sup>65</sup> P. B. G., American UDI commemoration participant. Phone interview, notes with author, May 9, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> For a great analysis of white settlers' senses of belonging in Rhodesia, see: D. McDermott Hughes. *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape and the Problem of Belonging*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010. See also: J. Brownell. "Out of Time: Global Settlerism, Nostalgia, and the Selling of the Rhodesian Rebellion Overseas." *The Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, no. 4. 2017.

<sup>67</sup> "They're Having a Ball," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 12, 1973.

The next year's Ball, 1974, was bigger by some scale than earlier Balls. With 700 guests, Margolis Hall could no longer house the celebration and so it was moved to the auction floor of Tobacco Sales Limited in Salisbury, where it would remain for three years.<sup>68</sup> Even at the ten-year anniversary in 1975 new parts of Rhodesia's repertoire of state symbols were still being added. At the Independence Day reception in Gwelo, the Minister of Justice presented Mary Bloom with a check for R\$500 for writing the winning entry for lyrics to Rhodesia's new national anthem, "Rise, O Voices of Rhodesia."<sup>69</sup> The ten-year anniversary was also a wartime commemoration. A *Herald* editorial on the tenth anniversary captured this bleak mood explaining that enthusiasm for Independence Day was largely among those "eight out of ten white people who support the Rhodesian Front through thick and thin," but the other 20 percent of whites and the vast majority of the African population "cannot be expected to share the euphoria of today's anniversary."<sup>70</sup> In their reporting, the *New York Times*, like the *Rhodesia Herald* were once again confused as to the number and significance of the Bell clangs and the origins of the Bell itself. They mistakenly reported that following the young nine-year-long tradition Smith rang the Bell ten times, one for each year of independence.<sup>71</sup>

Only a month before the 11-year celebration of UDI in 1976, Smith, under pressure from South Africa and the United States, conceded to the principle of African majority rule, which was a crushing defeat for his regime. In the Ball, Smith gave a speech that was, as he said, purposely "in a low key" because of the sensitive nature of the ongoing Geneva talks, but in keeping with past years he gave the impression that he was bursting with pride over the resilience and achievements of Rhodesians.<sup>72</sup> After ringing the bell 12 times, Smith led the crowd in a singing of the two-year-old national anthem. Lyrics for the anthem were provided on each place setting for those who had not yet memorized the words of the new song. The crowd was much more familiar with Smith's son-in-law's song "Rhodesians Never Die," which everyone reportedly sang along to,

<sup>68</sup> "PM Predicts 'Even Better' 10th Year of Independence," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 11, 1974.

<sup>69</sup> "Cheque is Presented to Anthem Author," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 12, 1975.

<sup>70</sup> "After Ten Years," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 11, 1975.

<sup>71</sup> "Rhodesians Celebrate Ten Years of Autonomy," *New York Times*, November 12, 1975.

<sup>72</sup> "Rhodesians Celebrate 11th Anniversary of Breakaway," *New York Times*, November 12, 1976.

enthusiastically.<sup>73</sup> One elderly party attendee told an American press man: “You must tell the people in your country that we are fighting for the whole free world. We are fighting against the Communists and to protect the Cape sea routes. Our fight is in your interests.”<sup>74</sup>

With the 1977 Independence Day the Ball had been returned to its original home, the smaller venue, Harry Margolis Hall where it had been held from 1966 to 1973. Like others, this was broadcast on the general service of the RBC during a regularly scheduled music program titled, “Making for Midnight.”<sup>75</sup> In his broadcast, RBC host Tony Gaynor<sup>76</sup> explained the significance of the Independence Bell, the 12 tolls of which, he said, “signify the departure of the old year and the dawning of a new one for Rhodesia.” The Master of Ceremonies announced before introducing Smith that “we are approaching the magical hour of midnight. Most of you here know the custom [of ringing the Bell]...” As Gaynor explained, during the 12 occasions commemorating UDI, “this Bell has become as permanent a feature as Christmas trees are of Christmas.” He added: “And I’m sure we all hope and pray that we shall continue to do so for years to come.”<sup>77</sup>

In his speech to the Ball, Ian Smith addressed the question over how many times the Bell will toll. “Now, just to get the record straight,” Smith said,

“In case you read a letter wondering how many times I was going to ring the Bell, and associating this with the years of independence. Those of you who come to these occasions know it that it has nothing to do with the years of independence. On the first such event, the Bell was wrung twelve times as it

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> RBC “Making for Midnight,” November 11, 1977. [www.rhodesia.me.uk](http://www.rhodesia.me.uk)

<sup>76</sup> Gaynor joined the RBC in 1974 and continued on for several years after Zimbabwean independence. He was fired in 2000 after he opened the Zimbabwean Broadcasting Corporation’s lunchtime news bulletin with the announcement: “This is the Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation. The time is one o’clock.” Gaynor pleaded that it was a mistake that he fell back into the old habit, but the Information Minister, Chen Chimutengwende was enraged, saying: “It was right that he was fired, because that is completely unbelievable and unacceptable. How could he say this 20 years after independence? It means his heart is still in Rhodesia.” “Radio Man Axed for ‘Rhodesia’ Blunder,” *Independent Online*, May 30, 2000. Accessed August 2015: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/radio-man-axed-for-rhodesia-blunder-1.39093#.Vc1a7hNVikp>

<sup>77</sup> RBC “Making for Midnight,” November 11, 1977. [www.rhodesia.me.uk](http://www.rhodesia.me.uk)

will be tonight, because this is the ringing in of midnight. I think it is the best plan, because if we were to ring once for every year of independence, you can imagine what the position would be when one of my successors in due time has to ring it one hundred... one hundred times.”<sup>78</sup>

The crowd laughed. After the ringing of the Bell, the Master of Ceremonies raised his glass and yelled: “Ladies and Gentlemen: Rhodesia!” To his radio audience, Gaynor then added in a mellifluous voice: “May I suggest that wherever you may be that you too may raise your glass and toast ‘Rhodesia.’”<sup>79</sup>

The guerrilla war had greatly intensified by 1977. While it never hit Salisbury proper, large swathes of the country were increasingly dangerous to drive because of landmines and ambushes, especially at night. In 1977, the government warned holiday travelers to observe security regulations when moving around the country on Independence Day.<sup>80</sup> This included complying with curfews, traveling with convoys, and only moving during recommended traveling times. Likewise, the Automobile Association of Rhodesia recommended that drivers be off the roads in “sensitive areas” by nightfall, join convoys whenever possible, and some areas were restricted for travel altogether from the hours of 3 pm and 6 am.<sup>81</sup>

Because of the continuous state of emergency in Rhodesia, and the state’s wide security powers, including preventative detention, African resistance to the commemoration was more in the form of nonparticipation than counterprotests. For example, on the 13th anniversary in 1978, the national holiday led to Salisbury city center being empty, but life went on as normal in the African townships of Harare and Highfield.<sup>82</sup> As it was, the ringing of the Bell in 1978 would be Smith’s last. Rhodesia conceded to an internal settlement in 1978, a change of name to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, and elections that brought Bishop Muzorewa to power in June 1979. On November 11, 1979, no Independence Bell was rung in Salisbury for the

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> “Holiday Caution Urged,” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 11, 1977.

<sup>81</sup> “Join Convoys if Possible,” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 11, 1977. Even so, hotels and resorts reported that they were at full or near capacity for the weekend. This included resorts in the vicinity of Wankie and Victoria Falls following a rocket attack on the Elephant Hills Country Club a week before. “Holiday Caution Urged,” *Rhodesia Herald*, November 11, 1977.

<sup>82</sup> Tom Wicker, “African Journey,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1978.

first time in 14 years.<sup>83</sup> African politicians in the five-month-old new government thought it unfitting to celebrate UDI and so the day was struck from the list of public holidays, but many whites reportedly still commemorated the day.<sup>84</sup> This internal settlement, wherein whites still held much of the power, produced a new flag and new symbols, but like the Smith regime that preceded it, Zimbabwe-Rhodesia could never achieve recognition during its short lifespan, and full elections brought in African majority rule and the creation of Zimbabwe in 1980.

### TRANSKEI

Transkei's independence ceremonies were a choreographed series of events that closely traced the forms of the "freedoms at midnight" celebrations but lacked their legal and emotional substance. Like those formal ceremonies to the north of them, Transkei's featured big parades, military reviews, official delegations from the mother state, and at the climax, the lowering of the mother country's flag with the Beating the Retreat ceremony, and the raising of the new state's flag at midnight.<sup>85</sup> Transkei and South Africa took pains placing Transkeian independence within this recognizable aesthetico-ideological genre, and everything about the planning of the day went toward promoting the idea that this was an actual transfer of power and a legal transfer of sovereignty.

Unlike Rhodesia, Transkei's mother state approved of the separation, not tacitly or grudgingly, but enthusiastically, and it was in part the degree of the Republic's enthusiasm that rendered Transkei's independence so artificial for most observers. South Africa orchestrated it and pushed it forward, and the Republic was the only state to ever recognize it. The independence of Transkei was never an end in and of itself for the Republic, but was to be the first of several ethnic enclaves to be peeled off from the Republic as part of the wider Bantustan policy. For apartheid South Africa, the creation of ostensibly independent, but functionally dependent, African satellite states, allowed the settler state to funnel nationalist political ambitions away from Cape Town and Pretoria without disrupting the

<sup>83</sup> "Rhodesia, For the First Time, Fails to Mark Independence," *New York Times*, November 12, 1979.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> For more on the symbolism of midnight in these celebrations, see: R. Holland, S. Williams, and T. Barringer, eds. *The Iconography of Independence: 'Freedoms at Midnight.'* London: Routledge, 2010.

labor supply that the Republic's economy relied upon. Apartheid planners hoped the creation of Bantustans could be sold to the world as a form of decolonization.<sup>86</sup>

Transkei's and South Africa's interests did diverge, however, as Transkei's independence was an end in and of itself for the Transkei regime. Supporters of Transkei's independence did not deny that the Bantustan system furthered apartheid South Africa's interests, but, as Transkei's supporters argued, this did not preclude the possibility that Transkei's claim for independence could also be legitimate on its own merit. Transkeian propagandists tried desperately hard to divorce the adjudication of their claims for sovereign status from a referendum of world opinion on apartheid. Once the other homelands began to be prepared for independence, this proved fatal to Transkei's dissociation argument. On December 5, 1977, Bophuthatswana became the next Bantustan to gain its pseudo-independence. It too was recognized only by South Africa, and Transkei only reluctantly recognized its fellow Bantustan. This same process and the same results would be replicated for Venda in 1979 and Ciskei in 1981.

Despite divergent perspectives regarding the ends of Transkeian independence, there was a convergence between the nascent government of Transkei and the Republic of South Africa in their strong interest in making Transkei's attainment of sovereignty appear to be convincing and its independence legitimate. But noticeably absent from the festivities was the real joy of Uhuru that was so much a part of the winning of independence elsewhere on the continent, what Alistair Cooke called the "ecstasy of Uhuru."<sup>87</sup> Where was the fun? While Transkei's independence moment was choreographed to mimic the decolonization ceremonies, their joyless and formulaic ceremony inadvertently served as the template for the other Bantustans which followed them.

### STAGING INDEPENDENCE

The date for Transkei's independence was a matter of negotiation between South Africa and the nascent Transkeian regime. Determining that foreign dignitaries were notoriously busy, it was believed that the date of independence should be nailed down at least 12 months in advance to give

<sup>86</sup> See: Roger Southall. *South Africa's Transkei*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983.

<sup>87</sup> Alistair Cooke. *Alistair Cooke's America*. New York: Basic Books, 2009.

dignitaries time to put it in their schedules. Robert A. Du Plooy of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, who would later serve as South Africa's Ambassador to Transkei, thought that the Transkeian Legislative Assembly term which was scheduled to meet on October 1, 1975, would be "an ideal opportunity" to announce the future date of independence a year hence.<sup>88</sup> Kaiser Matanzima, who was the Transkeian Chief Minister, suggested that independence should take place during the month of October of the next year, perhaps on the 25th.<sup>89</sup> Noting that October 25 was also United Nations Day, Du Plooy thought this to be a good choice, except that in 1976 the 25th was going to be a Monday, which meant organizing the arrangements for the celebration would be difficult with a weekend in front of it. It was therefore suggested that either Friday, October 22nd, or Tuesday, the 26th, be chosen as the date, even though Austria and Iran also have the 26th as their national day.<sup>90</sup> It was finally decided that October 26 would be a public holiday with shops closed that day and the next.<sup>91</sup>

With the date set, the South African government then focused on making the Transkei independence celebrations a success. Initially hopes were high among the ceremony's planners that large numbers of foreigners would show up which would lend the event some legitimacy. To this end, the Republic spent upward of \$500,000 on an international campaign to promote the independence of Transkei in newspapers and magazines and other means, putting into motion the vast South African propaganda machinery toward this goal.<sup>92</sup> To this end, the South African Department of Information sent a circular to all of its offices abroad detailing their plans in regard to Transkeian independence celebrations.<sup>93</sup> These included special publications, audio-visual projects, and invitations to foreign television teams, to 160 foreign journalists, as well as foreign members of

<sup>88</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei 1/226/1/1 "Independence Celebrations and Invitations," Memorandum by R.A. Du Plooy, "The Date of Independence of the Republic of Transkei."

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei 1/226/1/1 "Independence Celebrations and Invitations," "Minutes of Meeting of Committee on Transkei Independence Celebrations," February 24, 1976.

<sup>92</sup> See also: R. Nixon. *Selling Apartheid*. London: Pluto Press, 2016.

<sup>93</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei 1/226/1/1 "Independence Celebrations and Invitations," Memorandum by N. Van Heerden, "Invitation to Foreign Members of Parliament to Attend Transkei Independence Celebrations," June 14, 1976.

parliament.<sup>94</sup> Their circulars abroad asked that local Information Department offices put forward names of foreign members of parliament who would likely agree to come and send their names on to Pretoria. There were broader messaging questions as to these invitations, especially about how closely involved South Africa should appear to be. As one memorandum from an information official queried: "The question arises whether the invitations to foreign members of parliament should not be extended by the Transkei Legislative Assembly, or alternatively, by the South African Parliamentary Association, to disguise our hand somewhat and possibly make the invitations easier to accept."<sup>95</sup>

In a memorandum on the official guest list for the ceremony written in March, it is clear that Transkei and South African officials were very optimistic about attendance.<sup>96</sup> The official planning committee budgeted for 95 official cars to be set aside for guests and 700 official programs were printed for the occasion. In terms of formal entertainment, there was a banquet hosted by the South Africa State President for 200 guests; a banquet hosted by the Transkeian President for 200 guests; a luncheon at the Holiday Inn hosted by the South African Prime Minister for 150 guests "(men only)"; and a cocktail party hosted by the Transkeian Foreign Minister for 300 guests at the Holiday Inn.<sup>97</sup>

By July 1976, some early invitations had begun to go out.<sup>98</sup> Only three heads of state besides South Africa's were invited: these were the former High Commission Territories (HCT) of Swaziland, Lesotho, and Botswana.<sup>99</sup> The HCTs were always the group that Transkei sought to be associated with, and this had to do with Transkei's attempted positioning vis-à-vis the other homelands. Like Transkei, these three independent countries were to different degrees economically dependent upon South Africa and were particularly sensitive to pressures brought to bear upon

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei 1/226/1/1 "Independence Celebrations and Invitations," Memorandum by Dr. R. A. Du Plooy, "Official Guests: Independence Celebrations: Umtata: October 1976," March 30, 1976.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei 1/226/1/1 "Independence Celebrations and Invitations," "Invitations as at 27 July, 1976."

<sup>99</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei 1/226/1/1 "Independence Celebrations and Invitations," "Minutes of Meeting with Chief Minister at his Office," February 24, 1976.

them by the Republic. Yet all three were sovereign states. Jeremy Shearer, the South African Minister at the US Embassy, was in charge of training two members of what was intended to be the new Transkeian diplomatic corps. Shearer reported in a memorandum to Pretoria that he found that the Transkeian officials were “sensitive” to any comparisons between Transkei and the other homelands.<sup>100</sup> They argued that Transkei was a legitimate pre-colonial entity with a cohesive ethno-national logic behind it, while the other so-called homelands were not. From this, Shearer argues that there was an “obvious need to dissociate the Transkei from the homelands, linking its past with that of the ex-High Commission territories, partially for competitive reasons but principally at this stage not to jeopardise any faint chances of recognition.”<sup>101</sup> Positioning Transkei as like the HCTs and unlike the other Bantustans ran counter to the wider Bantustan policy, and while it certainly strengthened Transkei’s bid for independence, it necessarily harmed the bids of later homelands. In Washington, South African diplomats worked hard at trying to establish relationships between the Transkeians and the former HCTs.<sup>102</sup> When George Matanzima, Kaiser’s brother, visited the United States in May 1976 the South African Ambassador to the United States, Pik Botha, personally took him around to Lesotho’s, Swaziland’s, and Botswana’s Embassies and pushed each of them to recognize Transkei.<sup>103</sup>

Invitations to delegations were also sent out to all foreign countries that were not overtly hostile to South Africa.<sup>104</sup> South African officials already knew by July that many countries would not send an official delegation, but they still held out hope that some would. On one Foreign Affairs memorandum from July 1976, it was revealed that they expected they could convince at least one of the former HCTs to attend the ceremony, and of the 74 invitations sent for foreign delegations they planned

<sup>100</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei: Independence Celebrations and Invitations, 1/226/1/1, “Transkei Diplomats,” Letter from SA Ambassador to the US, Shearer, to the Foreign Secretary, DFA, November 13, 1975.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> P.T. Koyana-Letlaka. *This is My Life*. Xlibris, 2014. 220.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>104</sup> Many of the South American invitations were to be handed to Ministers of Health. Sierra Leone’s invitation was to be handed to the Minister of Justice, Ivory Coast’s to the Minister of Justice, Taiwan’s to the Minister of Agriculture. National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei 1/226/1/1 “Independence Celebrations and Invitations,” “Invitations as at 27 July, 1976.”

for 10 to say yes. They also planned to get 60 foreign members of parliament, and “7 or 12” ministers of state.<sup>105</sup> This was the estimate used for approximating accommodations in Umtata.

Seven months out from their Independence Day, and facing pre-emptive boycotts from the UN and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Transkei rested their hopes of recognition in Africa on the more friendly francophone African countries of Ivory Coast and Central African Republic (CAR).<sup>106</sup> CAR had been for some time leading up to Transkei’s independence actively engaged with South Africa as part of South Africa’s new detente exercise under PM Vorster. In February 1975, an official CAR delegation including senior members of the Cabinet visited South Africa and Transkei, and while in Transkei they met with Transkei Cabinet officials.<sup>107</sup> There was speculation that other countries engaged in South Africa’s detente policy, such as Malawi, might also eventually come to recognize Transkei.<sup>108</sup>

In April 1976, rumors began to circulate that South Africa was going to free Nelson Mandela from Robben Island as a signal of its willingness to open dialogues with the rest of Africa and the world.<sup>109</sup> This was viewed by sources for the *Rand Daily Mail* as a “trump card” for Matanzima to achieve recognition for Transkei.<sup>110</sup> Mandela was a Xhosa from the Transkei region and a cousin of Matanzima.<sup>111</sup> Observers speculated that such a move might be enough to allow countries such as Ivory Coast, CAR, and perhaps Swaziland to break the UN and OAU boycott and recognize Transkei. This in turn, it was hoped by Transkeian officials, would encourage the United States and Britain, who were both waiting for Africa to take the lead on this issue, to follow suit.<sup>112</sup> South African officials, however, were firm in their dismissals of any such idea, and Mandela was firmly opposed to the Bantustan project.

<sup>105</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei 1/226/1/1 “Independence Celebrations and Invitations,” “Invitations as at 27 July, 1976.”

<sup>106</sup> “2 Countries Hold Transkei’s Hopes,” *Rand Daily Mail*, March 25, 1976.

<sup>107</sup> “CAR Delegates Meet Vorster,” *Rand Daily Mail*, February 15, 1975.

<sup>108</sup> “Security Laws May Knock Hopes,” *Rand Daily Mail*, April 24, 1976.

<sup>109</sup> “Mandela May Be Free in August – UN View,” *Rand Daily Mail*, April 7, 1976.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> T. Gibbs. *Mandela’s Kinsmen: Nationalist Elites and Apartheid’s First Bantustan*. London: James Currey, 2017.

<sup>112</sup> “Mandela May Be Free in August – UN View,” *Rand Daily Mail*, April 7, 1976.

On September 15, 1976, Transkei received its first acceptance reply—from South Africa. The letter was play-acting:

I have the honour to thank you for your letter dated 16 August, 1976, extending an invitation to the Republic of South Africa to be represented at the Independence Celebrations of Transkei during the period 25 to 27 October 1976. I take pleasure in informing you that the Republic of South Africa will be represented at the Independence Celebrations by the State President and Mrs. Diederichs, myself and Mrs. Muller and The Honourable M.C. Botha and Mrs. Botha. Particulars concerning the arrival and departure of the South African delegation will be communicated to your office separately. Please accept, Mr. Chief Minister, the assurance of my highest consideration.<sup>113</sup>

In late September, Transkei received a second acceptance, this time from the Rhodesian regime, which had been only belatedly invited. The Rhodesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, P.K. Van de Byl, wrote:

Your Excellency, am greatly honoured by invitation to Independence Celebrations. My formal reply indicating the very great pleasure I will have in being present at this history-making occasion has been despatched. May I offer Your Excellency sincerest congratulations as the day of destiny for your nation approaches, and may I extend profoundest good wishes. Assurances highest considerations.<sup>114</sup>

At this stage, with only South Africa and Rhodesia attending, it was likely the Rhodesian acceptance was a greater messaging burden than a benefit. The Transkeians need not have worried, the day before independence *Rand Daily Mail* reported that: “Even Rhodesia, at one time the last hope for representation from an African country outside of South Africa, was given up [on].”<sup>115</sup> The Rhodesian regime, which was at the time preoc-

<sup>113</sup>National Archives of South Africa, Box: BTS 1/226/1/1 Vol. 3, “Transkei Independence Celebrations,” Letter from H. Muller, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Chief Minister of Transkei, Kaiser Matanzima, September 15, 1976.

<sup>114</sup>National Archives of South Africa, Box: BTS 1/226/1/1 Vol. 3, “Transkei Independence Celebrations,” Letter from SA Accredited Diplomatic Representative in Salisbury to Foreign Secretary, DFA, quoting message from PK Van der Byl, (undated, but September 1976).

<sup>115</sup>Patrick Laurence, Peter Kenny, “A Lonely Birth for Transkei,” *Rand Daily Mail*, October 25, 1976.

cupied with the Geneva Talks, ended up not sending anyone to Transkei's celebration.

A growing sense of panic began to overtake the planners as October approached and the RSVPs began to be returned.<sup>116</sup> With the odd exception, African leaders formed a solid wall against recognition of Transkei broadly, and more narrowly against attendance at the independence ceremonies. The Zambian press, for instance, even called for any African heads of state who attended the ceremony to be deposed.<sup>117</sup> To a Transkeian population who were mostly indifferent to it, a black South African population who were largely opposed to it, and a wider world community who thought it was at best a farce and at worst a travesty, Umtata and Pretoria did their best to puff up interest and excitement in the independence celebrations by placing it within a larger narrative of black emancipation.<sup>118</sup>

On the build-up to the celebrations, Transkei authorities cracked down on possible disruptive elements within the territory.<sup>119</sup> For Transkei to establish their external sovereignty through recognition, it was necessary to display to the world their "internal" support for independence among Transkeians inside and outside Transkei. Within South Africa, the apartheid regime organized massive celebrations of Transkeian independence in several African townships across the Republic with free beer and ox meat. The millions of South African citizens who spoke the Nguni language of the Xhosa people were soon going to lose their South African citizenship and be forced to become Transkeian citizens. Despite the state's best efforts, these independence celebrations were often met with protests and violence in the townships in the build-up to independence.<sup>120</sup> Outside Cape Town, for instance, heavily armed South African riot police had to keep protestors away from the 1000 attending a free feast of oxen and beer in a stadium in the black township of Langa hosted by the Transkei government.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>116</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: Transkei 1/226/1/1 Telegram from Ntshongwana to Du Plooy, "Independence Celebrations and Invitations," 1976.

<sup>117</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: BTS 1/226/1/1 Vol. 3, "Transkei Independence Celebrations," "Zambian Press Comment on Transkei Independence," Letter from the SA Accredited Diplomatic Representative in Salisbury to Foreign Secretary, DFA, September 30, 1976.

<sup>118</sup> See for example: "A Tough African Nationalist," *New York Times*, October 26, 1976.

<sup>119</sup> See: B. Streek. *Render Unto Kaiser: A Transkei Dossier*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981.

<sup>120</sup> "Youths Protest at Transkei Holiday," *New York Times*, October 17, 1976.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

The Transkeian and South African governments still prepared for 50,000 guests to descend on Umtata, which had a resident population of only 75,000.<sup>122</sup> All of the five big hotels were fully booked for VIPs in the days and weeks before, while the journalists, photographers, and other media were relegated to a high school hostel, and 12,000 Transkeians were to sleep in a “Tent Village” outside Umtata.<sup>123</sup> Umtata was in the days before the celebration decked out in the colors of green, ochre, and white, with their new flags unfurled across town.<sup>124</sup> After the formal transfer of power and the conclusion of the sporting calendar, on October 27<sup>th</sup>, there was planned to be a feast near the Tent Village where 40 oxen and 40,000 liters of beer would be provided.<sup>125</sup>

As the day approached, the final program was printed in the three new national colors of Transkei.<sup>126</sup> The day before independence the *Rand Daily Mail* ran a story titled, “A Lonely Birth for Transkei.”<sup>127</sup> Revisiting this anthropomorphic birth analogy, the article read: “The Transkei will celebrate its birth as an independent state at midnight tonight with South Africa as the mid-wife and sole official witness.”<sup>128</sup> On the actual day, the only official representative was the South African State President. A couple dozen parliamentarians from Europe and South America were all there in their private capacities.<sup>129</sup> Other rumors made the rounds right up until the very day that official delegations from Malawi and Taiwan would be arriving, but they never did.<sup>130</sup> The lack of attendance was impossible to hide. The official guest list was released and as the *Rand Daily Mail* noted it was “conspicuous by its long list of blanks in place of the names of countries invited to attend the independence celebrations officially.”<sup>131</sup> Transkei’s big show was a bust.

<sup>122</sup> “Human Floodgates Open as Africa’s 50th State Prepares for SA-Style Independence,” *Rand Daily Mail*, October 22, 1976.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Box: BTS 1/226/1/1 Vol. 3, “Transkei Independence Celebrations,” “General Programme, Republic of Transkei Independence Celebrations.”

<sup>127</sup> Patrick Laurence, Peter Kenny, “A Lonely Birth for Transkei,” *Rand Daily Mail*, October 25, 1976.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> N.M. Stultz. *Transkei’s Half Loaf: Race Separatism in South Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981. 118.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

Internationally, Transkei's Independence Day was met with hostility. On the same day as the purported handover of power in Transkei, the acting president of the African National Congress (ANC), Oliver Tambo, and the foreign affairs director of the PAC, David Sibeko, spoke to the UN General Assembly in New York City, and that body voted 134 to zero to declare Transkei's independence "invalid" and prohibit members from any dealings with Transkei or any of the other homelands.<sup>132</sup> To mark the occasion the UN again passed a resolution rejecting Transkei's independence. The OAU even held a "Festival of Rejection" during the week of Transkei's ceremony.<sup>133</sup> Not that it mattered at all to world opinion, but even Rhodesia failed to formally recognize Transkei, and Transkei likewise never recognized Rhodesia.

Despite all the planning, or perhaps the way that the planning was undertaken between South African and Transkeian elites with no public input at all, the Transkei people by and large did not feel any ownership of the Day or the celebrations. Scholars of national days have written of the spectrum of participation of the public in various national events.<sup>134</sup> If plotted along this spectrum, the Transkeian event was on the very extreme end of a minimal public involvement, a completely top-down affair. The glaring lack of enthusiasm was in stark contrast to the "freedoms at midnight" celebrations Transkei sought to mimic. *The Rhodesia Herald* correspondent sent to report on the ceremony wrote: "With the Transkei's independence less than a month away, visiting foreign journalists and diplomats are amazed by the absence of excitement and anticipation so characteristic of other African countries on the eve of 'uhuru,' "<sup>135</sup> A Transkeian civil servant, who insisted on being unnamed due to security regulations, was quoted as saying: "It's like a great big puppet show with the whites pulling the strings and we blacks dancing about on the Matanzima stage." Another Transkeian citizen said: "This is Kaiser's independence, not the peoples'. He wants to make every decision down to the last hymn to be sung on Independence Day. We might as well go on holiday and leave it all up to him and his white friends from Pretoria."<sup>136</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Stultz. *Half Loaf*, 118.

<sup>133</sup> R. Southall. *South Africa's Transkei*. 3.

<sup>134</sup> J. Gillis, ed. *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

<sup>135</sup> "No 'Uhuru' Fervour in the Transkei," *Rhodesia Herald*, October 4, 1976.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

After the formal handing over of the instruments of state at midnight in the Independence Stadium, Kaiser Matanzima made his first speech as the PM of the ostensibly independent state of Transkei. In his speech in front of the South African State President, Dr. Nicolaas Diederichs, Matanzima expressed his “contempt” for the racial policies in South Africa that had typified life under white rule for centuries. “We utterly reject the racial discrimination which has been characteristic of much that is South African,” Matanzima said.<sup>137</sup> He also rejected publicly the South African notion of Xhosa ethnicity conferring Transkeian citizenship automatically by citing Transkeian citizenship at 2 million, excluding the 1.3 million Xhosa in the Republic.<sup>138</sup> This independence speech, with its public reckoning of the colonial legacy in front of the (purportedly) former colonial masters, was directly reminiscent of Patrice Lumumba’s famous humiliation of King Baudouin at the Congo’s independence. Taking on the mantle of the martyr Lumumba was likely no coincidence. Nothing conveyed a sense of legitimacy more than a confrontation with the former colonizer, however, stage-designed and manufactured it might have been.<sup>139</sup>

As much of a bust as Transkei’s independence celebrations were, they would still become the template for the rest of the Bantustans. Bophuthswana’s independence on December 5, 1977, was remarkably similar. As with Transkei, Dr. Diederichs attended the ceremony, there were gymnastics and dancing in their new Independence Stadium, all taking place in the newly spiffed-up capital city paid for by the South African government. As with Transkei, traditional festivities continued near a tent village outside the capital, and at night a state banquet was hosted by Diederichs.<sup>140</sup> Importantly, as with Transkei the Bophuthatswana people evidently were indifferent about the whole affair. As the *New York Times* editorial eloquently put it following Bophuthatswana’s Independence Day: “[these homeland independence] ceremonies are part of an internal South African drama.”<sup>141</sup>

<sup>137</sup> “The Lonely Independence of Transkei,” *The Guardian*, October 26, 1976.

<sup>138</sup> “Matanzima Excludes Basothos,” *The Guardian*, October 27, 1976.

<sup>139</sup> In a telling interview from 1976, South African PM Vorster said: “... I sometimes wonder whether it would not be worthwhile for Kaiser Matanzima to just declare war on South Africa the day before independence, because then his chances of recognition would be much better.” Interview with the South African Prime Minister, Mr. B. J. Vorster, by Mr. Clarence Rhodes of UPITN-TV on February 13, 1976.

<sup>140</sup> “Sun Out in Time For Tswana Festival,” *Rand Daily Mail*, December 6, 1977.

<sup>141</sup> Editorial, “An Empty Ceremony in South Africa,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1977.

## COMMEMORATING TRANSKEI'S INDEPENDENCE

A month before the first year anniversary of independence, Matanzima said that Transkei would not have any official celebrations on its first anniversary due to a lack of money, and that independence celebrations would thereafter only be every five years.<sup>142</sup> If Matanzima's stated reason for not holding celebrations was in fact true, this would have been a budgetary decision without precedent even in the poorest of countries. Much more likely, Matanzima did not relish having another embarrassingly unenthusiastic celebration, especially after a year that had nothing to show for it in terms of international recognition.

Kaiser Matanzima did use the first anniversary of independence to call on the United States to recognize Transkei.<sup>143</sup> This one year anniversary, Matanzima said, could be an occasion for the United States to note how Transkei had become a non-racial society, and that the regime was supported by "an overwhelming majority of our citizens."<sup>144</sup> Interestingly, in his speech he defined the threats facing the young state of Transkei as the same facing white settler southern Africa, referencing the Rhodesian war against "terrorists" who target white and black civilians, as evidence of a communist march on South Africa and Transkei.<sup>145</sup> This anticommunist appeal was right in line with those made by the Katangese and Rhodesian regimes, and was similarly aimed at Cold Warriors in the West.

In April 1978, Matanzima's government dramatically broke off diplomatic relations with South Africa, and would only restore formal diplomatic relations in February 1980. As a result, Transkei's second and third year anniversaries in 1978 and 1979, respectively, took place under much tighter finances, since South Africa supplied a large amount of Transkei's governmental budget. However, this break also meant that Transkei had an opportunity to claim its complete independence from South Africa which was seen as a possible opening for a diplomatic breakthrough. In a reversal of Matanzima's earlier pledge to not hold celebrations as a money saving measure, Transkei's second year anniversary in 1978 was to be more ambitious in a last, desperate appeal to African leaders. Some weeks before, several African heads of state were invited to come celebrate

<sup>142</sup> Steve Kgame, "Matanzima Here to 'Bridge' Differences," *Rand Daily Mail*, September 15, 1977.

<sup>143</sup> "Matanzima Calls on the US to Recognize 'Kei,'" *Rand Daily Mail*, October 26, 1977.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> "Matanzima Looks to Transkei's Future," *Rand Daily Mail*, October 27, 1977.

Transkei's independence in Umtata.<sup>146</sup> Of the celebrations, Matanzima said he wanted to make them "continental," since Transkei was a member of the world community. "We belong to the Organisation of African Unity," he said, "although we have not been officially admitted."<sup>147</sup>

The full program of the second year anniversary in 1978 was released to the press some days before Independence Day.<sup>148</sup> Matanzima was to address the nation at the Independence Stadium, "[p]igeons will be released into the air and traditional dances will add colour to the ceremony."<sup>149</sup> The afternoon was to have a "gymkhana and traditional festivities," and the day was to end with an official banquet at City Hall. It was all very similar to the program at independence two years before, but with a new radical anti-apartheid message. In his speech Matanzima called on the OAU to provide military training for Transkei so that his country could continue the fight against apartheid from a position of strength.<sup>150</sup> Completely reversing himself from the last year's speech, Matanzima argued the biggest security threat to Transkei was from apartheid South Africa, not the communist march he described a year before.<sup>151</sup> Matanzima said it was time for the world to reconsider their decision to ostracize Transkei while embracing human rights violators elsewhere, and that while he was reaching out to all "peace-loving" nations of the world, he was not prepared to "belly-crawl" for recognition and friendship.<sup>152</sup> While the program was released, the guest list was not. Just as at the actual independence ceremony, and the one-year anniversary, no African heads of state attended.

The third Transkeian independence celebration was to be more subdued. There was to be none of the pomp and ceremony of the last anniversary. Instead of a centralized Umtata-centered celebration, the 1979 commemoration would be government officials giving speeches in 28 different areas around the country, a pattern that mirrored Rhodesia's.<sup>153</sup> A government spokesman said of the days planned events: "I wouldn't

<sup>146</sup> "Transkei Sends out Invitations," *Rand Daily Mail*, September 29, 1978.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> "Pomp at Kei Uhuru Party," *Rand Daily Mail*, October 23, 1978.

<sup>149</sup> "We Won't Belly-crawl – Matanzima," *Rand Daily Mail*, October 27, 1978.

<sup>150</sup> "Kei Calls on OAU," *Rand Daily Mail*, October 27, 1978.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> "We Won't Belly-crawl – Matanzima," *Rand Daily Mail*, October 27, 1978.

<sup>153</sup> "A Quiet 3rd Birthday," *Rand Daily Mail*, October 16, 1979.

exactly call them celebrations, the Ministers and MPs will address the meetings and then probably go home and watch television or something.”<sup>154</sup>

With the restoration of diplomatic relations with South Africa in February 1980, Transkei's budget coffers were once again replenished with South African cash. Matanzima's message to the attendees in the Independence Stadium, including the South African Ambassador to Transkei, Robert du Plooy, who stage managed the original Independence Day events, was one of a country under siege.<sup>155</sup> Repositioning the greatest threat to Transkei as being once again from “revolutionary elements,” not from South Africa, he said that foreign cash was pouring in to undermine his government. His was a bitter and aggressive message of a duplicitous and naive West betraying southern Africa to communism. Defiantly Matanzima channeled Ian Smith: “The nations of the world [think] this device [of denying recognition and aid] will cripple our government and destroy our country. Instead they have not succeeded in four years, and will not succeed in any given time.”<sup>156</sup> He said Transkei's true friend was South Africa, and that this friendship had “aggravated the hatred” of the world community against Transkei.<sup>157</sup> With the restoration of relations, Transkei had given up on independent recognition and resigned itself to coming back under South Africa's tight embrace. Transkei would not be formally reincorporated into the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa until 1994.

## CONCLUSION

Rhodesia and Transkei performed their Independence Days and subsequent commemorations for multiple audiences, inside or outside their borders. These regimes attempted to establish national rituals and invent national traditions that would be able to project to these various audiences that these regimes were legitimate expressions of self-determination, that they were fully functioning states, and that their cases for sovereignty were justified and sympathetic. In staging their Independence Days, both consciously linked their regimes to different aesthetico-ideological genres, but as they evolved, these national days were also seen as opportunities to craft

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> “Cash for Transkei Rebels Pours In, Says KD,” *Rand Daily Mail*, October 27, 1980.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

their national narratives in the images of their respective ruling parties. All the while these regimes' independence narratives were contested and disrupted by their opponents, and ultimately both failed to win any international recognition. Most importantly, these regimes were always seen as illegitimate by the majorities of their populations, something reflected in the lack of enthusiasm for independence among most of their citizenry, and this significant internal dissent was one of the important silences in Rhodesia's and Transkei's Independence Days. As a result, even as their clocks struck 12 during their annual celebrations no magic ever came at the midnight hour.

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## CHAPTER 12

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# Colonial Ideologies and the Emergence of Two Spaces: The Nigerian Experience

*Bright Alozie Chiazam*

### INTRODUCTION

Ideology has emerged as a significant conceptual framework for understanding imperial, colonial and postcolonial empire-building. It provides a successful road map for examining the ways in which empires were built, transformed, hybridized, or even resisted by societies across the globe. Ideology itself has become a matter of serious academic interest; the last two decades have seen a proliferation of academic works on ideology.<sup>1</sup> Recent developments have made it increasingly appropriate to study historical literature on empires based on imperial and colonial ideologies. These developments have prompted a flourishing revival in imperial studies. Researchers of ideology have made significant methodological, theoretical and empirical advances in intellectual history, discourse analysis,

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Freeden, et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), v.

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colonial studies, and imperialism, thereby bringing different strands and fragmentations of inquiry to the fore. These fragmentations across disciplines raise new questions about empires or better still allow us to approach the old issue of empire-building with new angles of vision. In the end, ideology becomes an important conceptual and normative tool for understanding the business of empires (what empires do, why and how they do it) in subaltern and postcolonial studies. This is the case whether one is considering the Spanish, British, French, German, Portuguese, Chinese, Indian, or even the American empires.

In truth, the world we live in is largely the product of the rise, competition, and eventual collapse of empires. It is not surprising then that an attempt to analyze the role of ideology in the vast historical panorama of imperial and postcolonial societies is hubris. However, in understanding the ideologies of empire, certain features must be borne in mind. First is the recognition that different individuals, groups, institutions, or societies are characterized by distinctive idiosyncratic worldviews that meaningfully shape their political thoughts and actions. Second is that we cannot simply study the role of individual ideas in isolation. Ideology is not a standalone; to explain why empires buy into certain ideas, and to explain how and why those ideas affect their actions in certain ways over a given period of time, we have to appreciate how those ideas operate as a part of a broader system of ideas. This interlocking, broader system of ideas leads to the pluralism of ideology as a concept and helps us to understand the way empires act. It is to this end that ideologies are defined as a “cluster of ideas, beliefs, opinions, values and attitudes usually held by identifiable groups, that provide directives, even plans, of action for public policy-making in an endeavor to uphold, justify, change or criticize the social and political arrangements of a state or other political community.”<sup>2</sup> Third and importantly is that the ideologies created for the legitimization of colonial rule most times end up recreating a new order or path. Here, the actualization of colonial ideology must battle with the inherent circumstantial variables on ground. This battle leads to the creation of spaces which shape the business of colonial administration and the emergence of different groups of individuals. Also, the ideologies used to justify colonial rule becomes the same ideologies used to construct belongings and space or even resist colonial rule.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Freeden, “Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy” in G. Gaus and C. Kukathas, Eds., *Handbook of Political Theory* (London: Sage Publishers, 2004), 6.

Imperial ideologies are the drivers of empires and this chapter examines some ideologies that are quite different from each other, but when taken together, permit a nested emergence of two spaces in colonial Nigeria. While the ideological impacts of the empires are considered especially as they relate to the evolution, development, administration, and end of empires, these impacts are felt on a grander scale as they helped further the colonial cause and laid the blueprint for postcolonial politics. Thus, the politico-historical emergence of the civic public spaces in colonial Nigeria occupied by the ruling elites of both British and local extraction, and borne out of the colonial ideologies of empire-building, becomes important to our understanding of how this historical configuration affected postcolonial Nigerian politics. The chapter draws insights from Nigeria, and it is of the view that the emergence and characteristics of the two spaces owe their origin to two critical bourgeois groups—the colonial administrators on ground and the select few indigenous elite borne out of the colonial experience. Ideologies were formulated around these two groups, especially the traditional Hausa caliphate in northern Nigeria, who were handily and conveniently used to legitimate colonial rule and exert control over the ordinary citizens. In the end, the ordinary man became the target of the intellectual workmanship of the two groups. This chapter offers some insights into the negotiations and encounters between the locals and the colonizers in which case, the narrative about colonial Nigeria must significantly shift from that told about the glorified colonizer and the victimized subjects. There is no doubt about the active involvement of the local agency and the African elite in the colonial dispensation. However, despite this interaction with the colonial fabric, the spaces created by the colonial ideologies have become one of the insidious legacies of colonial rule in Nigeria.

### IN DEFENSE OF THE PRACTICE: WHY IDEOLOGY MATTERS

The evolution of modern politics in many African countries today is largely the product of the overall colonial experience. The colonial interface in the history of Africa can hardly be forgotten with the passage of time, as it had a huge impact on the postcolonial nation-building project. However, the setting for our understanding of the outlay of colonialism lies in the ideologies behind the enterprise. When these ideologies were formed, they provided impetus for the execution of the colonial project.

The British colonizers attempted to create ideologies that not only backhandedly justified their penetration and rule of the colonies but also justified to their fellow countrymen their continuing actions. By means of these ideologies too, they succeeded in persuading the natives to accept British rule as being in their best interest. As a result, two bourgeois groups emerged and were to be the medium of encounter between the colonized population and the colonizers. First was the group of colonial administrators who were basically drawn from the realm of the burgeoning elite class in Europe. These elites bought into the colonial ideologies and were impressed by the rhetoric and propaganda behind them that they sought to leave the metropole and become part of the colonizing enterprise. Then, there were the African elites borne out of the ideological formulations of the colonial period. Combined, these elites stood out to define the colonial ideology in local context and were used significantly in the colonial dispensation. They were birthed around the colonial ideologies especially the Dual Mandate, civilizing mission and development ideologies. The case of Nigeria goes further to show how the colonial ideology produced a class of northern elites of bourgeoisie who would wield political power during the colonial period and subsequently retain such power of control at the end of colonial rule. The point to be noted here is that the emergence of the public realms in colonial Nigeria relates to the ideologies used to justify colonial rule in Nigeria. In most cases too, the ordinary subjects of the colony became direct targets of the workmanship of the emergent bourgeois groups.

It is true that any attempt to understand the ideology behind the evolution of colonial empires will first understand the meaning of empire itself. It is also true that the term “empire” has no settled definition—in fact, any attempt to control and delimit the meaning of empire has often formed a significant dimension of ideological disputation.<sup>3</sup> Amid the controversy surrounding a definite meaning of the term, scholars have come up with narrow and broad ideas of the term empire. On the narrow plane, empire implies the direct and comprehensive political control of one polity over another with the controlling polity usually being the more powerful. It is on this narrow plane that Michael Doyle defines empire as “a relationship ... in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another

<sup>3</sup> Duncan Bell, “Ideologies of Empire” in Michael Freeden, et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 536.

political society.”<sup>4</sup> Broadly, scholars have defined an empire as a polity which exerts decisive or overwhelming power in a system of unequal political relations, thus encompassing diverse forms of control and influence.<sup>5</sup> These connotations of the meaning of empire hold out certain features such as sovereignty, power, control, and influence which are characteristics of all the polities that have assumed empire status over the course of history. Such features also relate the meaning of empires to imperialism. Imperialism as a concept is a policy or strategy that aims to uphold or expand a territorial empire while broadly speaking, it involves more than just a ploy, strategy, or policy. It incorporates attitudes or dispositions that enable the evolution, maintenance, or even intensification of inequality between political communities. In view of these conceptual definitions, the key question is what are the ideological underpinnings in the evolution of the British Empire in Nigeria? Understanding the concept of ideology as a political, intellectual and socioeconomic phenomenon necessary for the survival of empires and legitimization of rule or control will create a better appreciation of how ideology also helps to create domains and spaces within the colonial regime. Without doubt, imperial ideologies are those elements of more general patterns of thought that relate to empire. They are nested within, and shaped by, what Bell calls social imaginaries.<sup>6</sup> These are ways people conceive of themselves and others, as well as their social existence and how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, their expectations, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. It is these imaginaries that constitute “that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely-shared sense of legitimacy”<sup>7</sup> which most times give justification for control. By situating ideologies and empires within the social imaginary construct, one can better understand the out-working of imperial imaginaries—how empires were thought of/imagined, and reasons for supporting imperial activity.

As with other colonies in Africa and Asia, Nigeria was one of the colonies in which the British entrenched their ideologies. These ideologies

<sup>4</sup> Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 45.

<sup>5</sup> See Duncan Bell, “Ideologies of Empire” in Michael Freeden, et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 536; N. Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America’s Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2004); and J. Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London: Vintage, 2003), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Duncan Bell, “Ideologies of Empire”, 538.

<sup>7</sup> C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

became expedient and convenient justification for the emergence of colonial rule in Nigeria. The British Empire was generally justified and legitimated by notions of European liberalism and Christian humanism. Colonial hegemony always had a moral undertone which was to free the people, protect their rights, and lead them to salvation and civilization. Colonization itself began with the ideological onslaught of the European missionaries, who mirroring a paternalistic character in their relationship with the Africans, set out to civilize and Christianize the locals. Before long, the missionaries were used by the officials as they became an integral part of the colonial project. No doubt then that terms such as “Dual Mandate,” “modernity,” and “civilization” came to feature prominently in empire discourses as justification for colonial rule. Based on these terms, two ideologies featured prominently in the British colonial project in Nigeria—the development ideology and the civilizing mission ideology. These ideologies have been explored at length by scholars. Joseph Hodge and his fellow development experts have devoted much scholarly attention to exploring the development ideology, while Alice Conklin has produced a brilliant study on the mission to civilize which was basically a French justification for rule in French colonies, but also applied in the British case as the dual mandate.<sup>8</sup> The aim here is not to rehash these ideologies or to argue about how much they lived true to their claims of development and civilization, but to understand how these ideologies legitimated colonial rule and hegemony in Nigeria and in the end, led to the emergence of two spaces in the colony. Unquestionably, both ideologies were used to legitimate colonial rule but then, as much as these ideologies were deployed to maintain the colonial status quo, they also served to create two realms which became platforms for some sort of negotiations, appropriations, mediations, interactions, and engagements. It is important to note that there are many historical complexities and nuances underlying the colonial discourse in Nigeria which are better understood through diverse lenses. At the outset of colonial rule in

<sup>8</sup> See Joseph Hodge and Gerald Hodl, “Introduction” in Joseph Hodge, Gerald Hodl and Martina Kopf, Eds. *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford University Press, 1997); Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2nd edition, 2014); Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

Nigeria, a relationship started between the colonized and the colonizer and as the land changed and underwent different political, economic and sociocultural transformations, there arose the need to create an additional space that would serve as a complement of the colonial administration.

### THE EMERGENCE OF TWO COLONIAL SPACES IN NIGERIA

Just as ideological formulations provided justification for colonial rule, they also led to the emergence of colonial spaces. The products of these formulations created two public realms which acted in favor of the colonial business. Two classes of elites were borne out of these ideologies namely, the European colonial elite and the local Nigerian elite. While the European elite held much of the power, the traditional elite did not wield as much power, but nonetheless had sufficient authority necessary to command the loyalty of the rest of the subjects to the British Crown. Such authority also conferred on them a measure of economic influence as they were best suited for the indirect rule policy in Nigeria.

The emergence of this first class of public elites is not surprising since they fitted in so well with the colonial ideology of the dual mandate and the *mission civilisatrice*. Of course, European expansionism and colonization of Africa and Asia first needed the elites at the metropolis for these ideologies to fully work. These elites were part of the policy-making group in Britain and were the product of the attempt by the European bourgeois to acquire some sort of political power through colonization, which will in turn consolidate its economic power at home. At the heart of the British colonial policy was the dominant ideology of dual mandate and the moral obligation of Britain to civilize its subjects. This inherent mission of Europe to civilize its subjects has been explored significantly by Alice Conklin.<sup>9</sup> She argues that inherent in the ideals of the Third Republic was a republican civilizing mission which according to the Governor General, Roume, was aimed at "... truly open Africa to civilization."<sup>10</sup> In the imagination of the French and of course, the British too, if only native populations would accept Europeans' educational guidance or medical advice and embrace intrinsic superiority of the West, they could be culturally uplifted. For the British, they saw their mission overseas as something loftier than the mere extraction of Africa's resources for exclusive benefit

<sup>9</sup> Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

<sup>10</sup> Alice L Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize ...*, 51.

of Europe. Roume captures the imperial ideology when he states that “we have a higher ambition and a significantly broader intention, we wish truly to open Africa to civilization.”<sup>11</sup> So, based on the moral force of education and civilization, the civilizing mission and dual mandate became the *sine qua non* for Britain’s colonial success in Nigeria and the local elites who emerged to occupy the public space were products of this ideology to civilize even though it is highly debatable as to how really civilized they turned out to be. Indeed, while certainly accurate regarding the ideological propaganda, the British also had plenty to gain from this “civilizing” mission. No doubt, there was a notion of improving the economic, social, and intellectual well-being of the African population. On the ground, however, this notion was obscured by real imperial ambitions of the British, namely economic exploitation. In their efforts to justify and execute the idea of development and civilization, the British also created a working structure to serve their ideologies and objectives. The huge cost of running the vast Nigerian colony also made genuine development bogus. A policy of financial self-sufficiency was also necessary if economic exploitation was to be maximally achieved. Spencer affirms this when he noted that “budgetary calculations ... took precedence over universalist dreams,”<sup>12</sup> thus making spending difficult. Hence, the lack of adequate personnel, financial capabilities, coupled with tight budget, implied that very little capital could be invested in infrastructure and development. Even when some degree of development was attained, focus was more on infrastructure of exploitation rather than pure humanitarianism or social welfare for colonial subjects.

During colonial rule in Nigeria, a new local elite emerged reflective of the imperial ideologies. First, they had acquiesced to the reality of colonial rule and some of them had also acquired Western education in the hands of the colonizers and their missionary collaborators. By acquiring Western education, they became radically exposed to the colonial ideologies and in dramatic fashion, not only clashed with the British officials in their new-found prominence but also used these ideologies as legitimation to their claims for power after colonial rule. They depended on the ideologies of colonialism for their own legitimacy and claimed to be competent enough to rule their people in the end. Many of the perceptions of the British and

<sup>11</sup> Alice L Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize ...*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Spencer D. Segalla, “The Micropolitics of Colonial Education in French West Africa, 1914–1919” *French Colonial History* 13 (2012): 16.

their Western education were encouraged in day-to-day life in the colony. They were in part promoted to sustain that aura of charisma that defined the civilized European which formed the ideological basis for colonial rule. To further drive home the ideological point, the British administration in Nigeria undertook the strategy of separating “native” from Western institutions and defining the “native” in terms of a condescending status. The mission thus was to “civilize” and make modern the native. This condescending ideological mission found visible expressions in the system of indirect rule adopted by the British in Nigeria which was also found to be most practicable in the northern region of the country. However, there were contradictions in the practicability of this idea as the Western educated local elite still battled to come to terms with the “native” life. It was a difficult transition for the “educated native” as he struggled to adapt to two mentally opposing orders. In response to this challenge, he defined one of the orders in moral terms and the other in amoral terms. On the one hand, the native sector came to be defined as a public entity tasked with primordial reservoir of moral obligations and from which one works to preserve and to utilize to one’s advantage. On the other hand, the other space, the Western sector whose aim was to civilize, exploit, and administer was defined as an amoral civic public from which one seeks to gain with no sense of public morality. These ideas came to influence postcolonial politics in Nigeria.

A further exploration of these ideologies shows how they manifested in the indirect rule policy to create the two realms in colonial administration. By the twentieth century, the British colonial administration had been effectively established in Nigeria and guided by the ideology of civilizing and developing the colony, the indirect rule policy was conceptualized as an indigenization of the colonial administration as the British facilitated their rule through the political and social institutions on ground.<sup>13</sup> To achieve this though, they needed an elite on ground that would subscribe to the colonial ideologies. At the fore of the British policy in Nigeria was the Lugardian doctrine which essentially argued that African institutions would best benefit by undergoing the “refining” process of colonial rule, except they were repugnant to European ideas.<sup>14</sup> In the process of this

<sup>13</sup> Chima Korieh, *The Way We Lived: Essays on Nigerian History, Gender and Society* (New Jersey: Goldline and Jacobs Publishing, 2013), 190.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: New Impression, 1965), 192.

refinement, there emerged two elite groups used as refining tools namely British officials who administered the colony and the local elite drawn from the crop of loyal subjects willing to assist and learn the ways of the administration. As these groups evolved, there emerged the idea of a lesser “other” in which the native was considered inferior. In the Lugardian doctrine, the idea of a lesser “other” was clearly reflected. The native was seen as always inferior and needed civilizing by a superior and more developed influence. It is not surprising then that the British considered their colonial mission to be a dual mandate, one that involved colonizing the people on the one hand and civilizing them on the other. Even so, among the local subjects of the administration, there were significant chasms between the emergent local elite used to run the colony and the rest of the locals who were merely subjects. For instance, the favored Hausa elite saw themselves superior to the rest of the country since they had the power and believed that political power would never elude them during and after British rule in Nigeria. In a similar vein, the Yoruba of western Nigeria prided in the superiority of their educated intelligentsia who took advantage of early missionary and colonial education in Nigeria. All these no doubt reflected the racist tendencies of the colonial mission, as well as the ethnocentric leanings of the colonial and postcolonial periods.

Lugard himself recognized that practical realities were essentially the success of the British administration in Nigeria. To that end, he sought to develop a theory that would not only solidify the overall colonial ideologies but also create “collaborators” for the administration. These collaborators would form the new public of local but Western educated elites. The need for such collaboration was well articulated in his magnum opus *The Dual Mandate on British Tropical Africa* where he viewed “continuity and decentralization” as “the first and most important conditions in maintaining an effective administration.”<sup>15</sup> According to him, cooperation was the key link in the chain and such cooperation was necessary between the government and the commercial community. In order to achieve this imperial ideal, “every individual adds his share not only to the accomplishment of the ideal, but to the ideal itself. Its principles are fashioned by his quota of experience; its results are achieved by his patient and loyal application of these principles, with as little interference as possible with native customs and modes of thought.”<sup>16</sup> With the articulation of the path to

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

achieving the colonial ambitions for the British Empire, it was clear that the northern and western parts of Nigeria suited Lugard's frame of operation and thus were suited for the application of the imperial ideologies. Stronger was the conviction that northern Nigeria could produce the crop of collaborators willing to facilitate the colonial agenda. It was not surprising then that the indirect rule policy was first introduced in northern Nigeria and met with huge success. With the establishment of indirect rule in the region, there emerged the class of local elites who were loyal to the ideals of the Lugardian doctrine and the principles of the colonial ideologies.

Already, the old aristocracy had been dismantled and by 1903, the Sokoto caliphate had ended and Britain had full control of northern Nigeria. However, the social structures of the caliphate were not destroyed and it was from this that Britain built its crop of elites. The idea was to integrate aspects of the Islamic institutions into the colonial bureaucracy and by so doing save cost of administration. Hence, Muslim leaders of northern Nigeria formed the new elite who retained some of their pre-colonial status and were willing collaborators with the British. Even though Christianity was not deeply entrenched in the region, the British colonial official established schools for Muslim elites, which were closed to non-Muslims. For instance, Korieh noted that in Kano, a school of Arabic studies was created to teach Islamic law and Muslim magistrates could preside over marriages, property, inheritance, and divorce cases.<sup>17</sup> Also, in western Nigeria, a degree of success was recorded as the chieftaincy institution led to the emergence of an educated elite ruling class which was loyal to the Crown, but also an authority in maintaining colonial control of the ruling class. However, in eastern Nigeria this policy was introduced in the 1920s but met with serious opposition and efforts to create a local elite largely failed. This was hardly surprising given the number of contradictions in the eastern region as the region was seen as a stateless society which was egalitarian in nature, hence, not most suitable for indirect rule. Importantly too was the fact that most people in eastern Nigeria did not really appreciate the policy and the new political and administrative structures set up by the British officials. It took a long time for the warrant chieftaincy institution to really take firm roots in eastern Nigeria and when it did, it was not

<sup>17</sup> Chima Korieh, "Islam and Politics in Nigeria: Historical Perspectives" in Chima Korieh and Ugo Nwokeji, eds, *Religion, History and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Ogburn U. Kalu* (University Press of America, 2005), 109–124.

an exercise that recorded huge success. Nonetheless, the point to be made is that by using the indirect rule policy to create a local elite which retained some measures of precolonial status and still served the interests of the Crown, the colonial officials succeeded in instilling a peculiar sense of identity on the new elites and infused “Britishness” in them as they were thought to be the local torchbearers in the execution of imperial ideologies. With some degree of education, there arose this imperial imaginary of the quintessential subject who occupied the space of pseudo-administrator. The new elite believed in the ideology of development and civilization more so in the fact that it had the power to also help the British civilize the local and develop the colony. It was this same principles and ideals that served as the motivating propaganda to carry out nationalist ambitions. Thus, the emergence of the local elites in form of the chiefs and administrative assistants represented an ideal creation of a public colonial space which existed side by side with the European elite in the colony.

The northern region of Nigeria aptly epitomized this imperial ideal. The British used the Sokoto caliphate to achieve their mission of civilizing those considered not civil or modern. As Ochonu rightly noted, they “came to northern Nigeria desirous of identifying and collaborating with a group of rulers representing a cultural and political entity that they deemed “civilized” and sophisticated enough to be partners in the colonial project.”<sup>18</sup> This idea of administrative sameness was expected to weave through the colony of Nigeria across all regions, east, west, north, and even the middle belt and south-south. The Hausa-caliphate worldview and those who best represented it—the Hausa-Fulani emirs and the caliphate aristocracy—became the quintessential paradigm for the smooth administration of colonial rule in Nigeria. The British thus conferred that notion of imperial citizenship and privilege to the caliphate and its ruling class in the north leading to the rise of the privileged northern elite in the colonial politics of Nigeria. This ruling class was to work side by side with British elites who were part of the officials and policymakers as well. The imperial imaginations, coupled with the need to smoothly execute the ideologies and ambitions of the British Empire, produced a British colonial knowledge system which easily privileged the notion of a paradigmatic

<sup>18</sup> Moses Ochonu, “Colonialism within Colonialism: The Hausa-Caliphate Imaginary and the British Administration of the Nigerian Middle Belt”, *African Studies Quarterly* 10 no. 2&3 (Fall 2008), 100.

Hausa-caliphate politico-cultural sophistication.<sup>19</sup> While this “ideal” caliphate existed to serve British interests, there was also the supposed “other”—those who were not modern yet or who had not conformed to the colonial policy yet. In fact, it was the task of the Hausa caliphate to lead their own local indigenes as well as their neighbors in the Middle Belt, namely, the Tiv and Idoma irrespective of the fact that these had different linguistic, cultural and political orientations. Thus, the Hausa elite occupied that amoral civic public which was solely tasked with serving the British interest by commanding the loyalty of the people. As expected, there were series of contests that this historical process triggered as the people came at loggerheads with the local elites. While the northern caliphate served British interests, they were not really interested in knowing whether the Hausa-caliphate worldview would work in other regions.

In creating the local elite on ground, the British had acquainted themselves with the political, economic and administrative technologies of the caliphate as well as with what being Hausa-Fulani connoted within the caliphate.<sup>20</sup> The writings of explorers, missionaries, and other European adventurers helped to shape their view of the region and they paid no heed to the non-Muslim frontiers of the region nor did they pay any heed to the existing precolonial conditions of other groups. They simply crafted a privileged emirate administrative system that was to be the guide to civilization and development. The British greatly admired the Islamic caliphate, and the social constructions or imperial imaginary of the caliphate as worthy partners became emblematic of the ideologies of the British Empire. The emergence of this ruling class clearly fitted in the administrative toolbox of the British and the caliphate system was the product of what Ochonu calls a convenient confluence of administrative expediency and prior understandings of social, political and economic organization which was inherently consistent with the “British colonial fixation on the administrative utility of so-called martial races and their assumed ability to act on behalf of the British as agents of socio-cultural tutelage and as proxy colonial administrators.”<sup>21</sup> Not surprising, this imaginary had roots in the British colonial exercise in Asia, notably India, where the system of identifying and using “martial races” had been in operation in the British Raj for

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

more than a century.<sup>22</sup> The British merely saw the protectorate through the lens of their earlier experiences in colonial administration in Asia. This imaginary placed a commensurate amount of political importance to the ruling class, a higher race, and suchlike categories. Hence, the ethnological taxonomy that was obtainable in the British Raj was intended to work for the Nigerian colony and the Hausa region were the most viable candidates for this imperial imaginary in Nigeria. Credit for the creation of this colonial imaginary goes largely to the British travelers and colonial ethnographers whose elaborate discourses and accounts persuaded the British of the worth of the Hausa as allies. Also, the way the caliphate presented itself in political and theological writings appealed to the British. They had this vision of the caliphate in mind being benevolent and kind and this model vision fitted into the British imperial ideology as it saw its colonial venture as a benign exercise and used the civilizing mission and development ideologies to exemplify their intentions. In the end, the Hausa ruling elite emerged and existed side by side in partnership with the colonial officials. Once the primacy of the Hausa caliphate had been established, it became easy for the British to formulate policies and ideological discourses that would suit their imperial ambitions in Nigeria. In occupying the colonial space, this emergent ruling class became the colonial middlemen and tutors bestowed with the task of civilizing and preparing the “pagans” for indirect rule. There was therefore the colonial space shared by two publics—the British, on the one hand, whose task was to colonize the people and civilize them, and the traditional ruling elite, on the other hand, whose task also as colonized was to “colonize” and “civilize” the locals. The task of this emergent elite went beyond the caliphate as they scoured the peripheral towns and communities outside their region with the aim of helping to civilize. This led to migration and heavy Hausa presence in the Middle belt and southwestern regions of Nigeria.

The traditional elite that emerged functioned as an amoral civic public whose worth was measured in material terms. Most times, there was no moral urge on the elite to give back to the community as individuals gradually and consistently sought gain for themselves. After all, the colonial enterprise was all about making material gain and the system was exploitative in nature. With a large dose of amorality, the emergent ruling class helped to facilitate the British culture of economic exploitation

<sup>22</sup> See Pradeep Barua, “Inventing Race: The British and India’s Martial Races”. *Historian* 58 no. 1 (September 1995): 107–116.

and corruption as they soon turned out to be high-handed and arrogated so much power without legitimacy to themselves. Thus, with the emergence of the two spaces and with each performing the same role, there arose several dialectical confrontations and tensions between these publics, as well as with the locals who increasingly grew dissatisfied with the system and its dual mandate. In the end, tribalism, lackadaisical attitude, ethno-politics, and corruption became dominant features of the colonial administration, and were transferred to the postcolonial politics which was virtually administered by the same ruling class that served colonial interests.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the ideological underpinnings of the colonial venture in Nigeria, and explored how the formulation and execution of these set of ideologies in Nigeria led to the emergence of two colonial public spaces. The colonial public was shared by the British elites/officials and the new group of elites in Nigeria borne out of the colonial ideology. The British elites comprised those in London making policies, and in the Nigerian colony doing the job of administration. Lugard and his band of administrators represented the group of elites in the colony charged with the responsibility of executing British imperial ambitions. As for the traditional elite, they were used as partners in the colonial administration and they were largely drawn from the Hausa-caliphate system. The emergence of these groups led to contestations for space as they were both tasked with nearly the same responsibility. Thus, the politico-historical emergence of the two spaces in Nigeria out of the colonial ideology of empire-building helps to explain the dynamics of postcolonial Nigerian politics. The postcolonial challenges of Nigeria are due to the dialectical relationship between these two spaces, which lacks public morality and acts for its sole material benefit. The emergence and characteristics of the two spaces owe their origin to two critical bourgeois groups—the colonial administrators on ground and the select few indigenous elite borne out of the colonial experience. Ideologies were formulated around these two groups and used effectively to legitimate colonial rule over the ordinary citizens, whereas the ordinary man became the target of the intellectual workmanship of the two groups. The Hausa caliphate represents the emergence of the traditional ruling class who served as partners in the colonial business and existed alongside the British officials. The spaces created by the colonial

ideologies have become one of the insidious legacies of colonial rule in Nigeria. No doubt, the tools of contemporary politics in Nigeria inhere in the conception of the colonial ideologies and politics that followed it. Nigeria's postcolonial present has been fashioned after the colonial past, and it is such past that has defined the political spheres of morality that has defied political practice today. The laissez-faire attitude, ethno-politics, and corruption that continue to plague the country show evidence of an amoral civic public wherein the public office holders give no recourse to morality or political decency. For sure, any politics devoid of morality is damaging and the destructive outcomes of Nigeria's postcolonial politics really owe something to the amorality of the civic public sphere, comprising British elites and local elites alike, which emerged in the colonial period. A space that was dictated by the rise of a ruling class whose sense of duty was to wield power, dominate and exploit the colony. So, while the civilizing mission, dual mandate, and development were ideologies used to legitimate colonial rule in Nigeria, they also served as the principal propaganda for the emergence of the two spaces or publics in Nigeria. It is therefore safe to state that ideologies serve different purposes, and, in most cases, the product of the execution of such ideologies in colonies is sometimes unintended. While they offer insights into colonial rule during this period, they help also to explain the destructive postcolonial politics in Nigeria.

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